READY MONEY MORTIBOY

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READY-MONEY MORTIBOY.

A Matter-of-Fact Story.

(REPRINTED FROM "ONCE A WEEK.")

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

WITH INITIAL DESIGNS BY F. W. WADDY.

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READY-MONEY MORTIBOY.

A MATTER-OF-FACT STORY.

CHAPTER THE FIRST.

"I MUST send you a piece of news, dearest Kate," wrote Grace, "before coming to what I have really to say;—that is, my letter is to be a woman's letter, with all the important part at the end. The news is, that Dick met Frank last week in London. The account of him is pretty good—for Dick, that is, who is a better story-teller than historian. That sounds like nonsense; but what I mean is, that he tells capital stories so long as he is allowed to draw upon the

boundless fields of his own imagination, and keep to Texas; but when one wants exact descriptions of what really took place, one finds him sometimes a careless observer. This is a fault, perhaps, common with your great geniuses. For my own part, I never invented anything in all my life—and how people can write novels, goodness only knows!—but I can always manage to tell exactly what I saw. The feminine eye, my dear, has a remarkable power of taking in everything at a glance. I am sure you will own that no man ever yet was born—not even Robert Houdin—who could pass a woman in the street and be able to tell afterwards everything she had on, from top to toe, and what it cost. You and I can do it, easily. That was just what I wanted to know about Frank. 'Tell me,' I said, 'what he looked like, and how he was dressed.' Well, you know, Dick was with him for eight long hours, and he can't tell me. He doesn't even know whether he wore gloves. He met Frank somewhere, and they went together to the University cricket match. After that they went and dined together, of course—one cannot imagine men meeting without dining together. I begin to think that there must be some secret religious worship, a kind of stomachic Freemasonry, connected with dinners; or else that eating, with men, has a

poetry about it which it fails to have for us. To-day, for instance, we had roast veal for dinner; but I am as prosaic after it as if it had been cold mutton. They dined together, Kate, and then they talked and smoked all the evening. Finally, Frank went away, half promising to call on Dick in the morning. *He never came.* All these details, I dare say, you know from Frank himself. What I wanted to learn exactly was how he looked, and if he was dressed properly; because I have often read in books that dress is a good rough test of prosperity, and if a man is doing well he always has a good pair of boots and a good coat. Don't be deceived by a bad hat, because the richest men sometimes have a bad hat. Poor Uncle Richard's hat was always really beyond everything. When a man begins to go downhill, it shows itself first in the heels of his boots, and next in his trousers. You would hardly believe that Dick—the man I believed so clever—never noticed Frank's boots at all. I made Lucy ask him the question, because I had asked after all the rest of his apparel, and Dick might have thought me inquisitive.

"'Boots?' asked Dick. 'I never looked at his boots.'

"And yet he calls himself an observant man!

"My dear Kate, I am so happy to have seen some

one who has actually seen Frank, that I write all manner of nonsense. He was looking very well indeed, Dick declares. He was happy—had a pleasant day. Dick did hint at some sort of fight; but that must be an allegorical way of describing a pleasant day. Just like the Americans, when they go to see a great sight, say they are going to see the elephant, so my cousin, our cousin, Dick Mortiboy, when he wishes to convey the idea of perfect happiness, says he has had a fight. That is my theory, because I cannot believe that men can possibly feel any pleasure in banging each other about. Frank gave a happy and cheerful account of himself. Dick thinks that he is making money by art; or, at all events—because we hardly expect him to make money—that he is gradually getting work, and making a success for himself. The career of a man! Is it possible to be too ambitious? Lucy thinks that ambition means selfishness. She says that a man ought to follow what she calls the straight line of duty—look neither to right nor left, and be careless whether people praise him or not. I try to persuade her that all men are not clergymen. I like to have my clergyman really pious and disinterested—I suppose, because one never gets that kind of clergyman—just as I should like to have all sorts of impossible

things in sealskin. A man—fancy, a Man!—came down here last winter with a long sealskin coat—real sealskin, mind—worth at least a hundred pounds. Now, that I call a wasting of good things. But about ambition. What I should like would be to see my husband distingushed: first in everything; people looking after him; pictures of him in the shop windows; a portrait of him in the *Illustrated;* biographies of him; cartoons, and even caricatures, of him. This is my ambition for myself. I should be plain Mrs. ——; it's bad luck to write your married name before you are married—look after his house, see that his dinner was always exactly what he liked, and endeavour to find out what it is that men admire so much in different kinds of wine. Tell me you agree with me, Kate. But for a man not to be ambitious! If I had a husband not ambitious of doing something—of being first in his own circle, even—I would stick pins in him till he was. Would not you? But Lucy, the dear child, has no ideas that are not founded on what poor Aunt Susan used to tell her. Aunt Susan! What would she have thought of her nephew Dick? She was always talking to Lucy about him—always saying that she knew he was not dead—always praying for him—always telling of his good heart. How proud she would have been of him!

"Yes, Kate—Frank is well and happy. Of course he tells you he is; but it is really true—because Dick, who is unobservant about boots, would not be deceived in this. He laughs; he eats and drinks; he is well dressed; he is too proud to take any assistance; he is getting on in his profession; and, without telling Dick anything, he asked after me ten times. Ten times, Kate! Always my own Frank—with the same bright face, and the same cheery voice. And now I know this, I've got an answer always ready, in case of little domestic storms, which you may guess.

"And now for the real thing in my letter. Kate, you are very wicked! You dare to make great successes, and to say nothing. You presume on our country ignorance. You knew that I should not go to town this season at all. You were afraid, perhaps, in your pride, that Dick would buy your picture: you were even too proud to have it exhibited in your own name. My dear, I am proud of you. Frank told Dick, who didn't think much about it—such is his Californian ignorance!—and casually told papa, who didn't think much about it, because his lines have not been cast much among picture galleries. He casually told me. I jumped—I did, indeed. A picture in the Royal Academy!

Actually accepted, and hung in a good place, and sold! Oh, Kate! how proud you ought to be! And never to have told me a word about it. Working away in your little Welsh village in silence, without a soul to speak to: sending up your picture in a name that prevented the committee from knowing whether it was a man or a woman! Of course, if they had known your sex, they would have rejected you with ignominy, in pursuance of their grand plan of keeping Us down. My dear Kate, it was sublime. Now the Academy is all over and done, and we have not even seen the picture. If we had known, of course we should have all gone to town—mamma, and Lucy, and myself, and Cousin Dick, to see it. Dear Kate, I am so glad, so very glad! It must be the best consolation you have had since your troubles. Write and tell me you are happy about it; and, *please*, don't keep secrets from me. I will guard your secrets so faithfully that not a soul shall know there is a secret. Tell me all your plans.

"Parkside is the same as ever. Somehow, we see more of Lord Launton than we used to. I wish he would not come in so often; for though he is very pleasant and all that, it is rather embarrassing if people come and find him there. We are

partly his father's tenants, of course; but that is not a reason why he should come and play croquet with us. Then, we are not in a position to be invited to the Towers; and though he does not mean to be condescending, it is in some respects desirable, as mamma says, that he should not come. The worst of it is that we treat him, Lucy and I, as such an old friend, that we really do not take any notice of him, and quite ignore the fact that he is a real viscount. The other day, the Battiscombe girls were here. We had croquet, Cousin Dick, music, and a little dance. Lord Launton came in by chance, and stayed with us. They—I mean the girls—were immensely jealous of us; and, I have not the least doubt, hate us both for being intimate with him. I am reminded of our gardener—you know him? I saw him one day last autumn, standing for two hours together admiring his chrysanthemums. Then I went out to him, because I thought he might catch cold. He waved an admiring hand at the flowers.

"'Bless you, miss,' he said in the grandest way, as if that was nothing to what he could do if he brought his mind to bear on it, 'I take no manner of pride in them.'

"That is what I say to Lucy about Lord Launton.

Is it not rather humiliating to us that the earl allows him to come here so often? You see, he thinks that we are good, worthy people; and that papa, in whom he has the good sense to believe, is a most excellent person; and that we are all so deeply flattered by a visit from his son, that it is kindness to let him come as often as ever he likes. For my own part, I am going to take an early opportunity of speaking to Lord Launton seriously.

"I think Dick is recovering the ground he lost by his dreadful speech at the children's feast. The rector, good man, looks on him with eyes of suspicion, and so do the curates; but the people have taken his advice very much to heart; and, I believe, several pères de famille are seriously contemplating the desirability of sending their sons away. They go down, and consult Mr. Mortiboy at the bank. Dick gets a lot of maps, and points out where they can emigrate to, and what it will cost. He never fails to lecture them on the folly of trying to make their sons 'gentlemen,' as they call it—that is, to put them into banks and lawyers' offices, so that they may wear a black coat. He still continues his unrighteous practice of giving weekly doles to old women. I think Mr. Ghrimes instigates him to this. He tells us that he has

dissolved partnership with his old friend, who has got all his Mexican estates. Those estates abroad do not seem to have weighed very much on his mind; and he confessed to me once that they were only valuable when a man of energy—meaning himself—was on the spot to superintend them. He showed me on the map where they were: put his thumb down—you know he has got an enormous thumb—and it covered a quarter of Mexico, about a hundred thousand square miles.

"'There,' he said—'my estates are exactly there.'

"'Thank you, Dick,' I said. 'I am very much wiser than I was before.'

"Then he laughed, and began to talk about something else.

"Whenever I write to you, I tell about Dick. I do not know how it is, except that he really does occupy our minds and our talk a good deal. What he did last, what he is going to do next, if he has committed any outrage on the church or conventionalities in general—this is chiefly what we talk about. I like him better every day. I think he is getting softened, and more companionable. He has left off the use of strange expressions in

unknown languages. He has begun to dress more like an ordinary Christian. He falls in with our ways and habits of thought. In time, I hope we shall make him a steady, respectable member of society. What I try to teach him is, that we may be altogether wrong, but that we are all wrong together—only the division of a word, you see—and it is very disagreeable not to be like other people. We had a talk the other day about things.

"'You go to church because it is respectable,' he said.

"'Well, and what if we do? Going to church is good for people. If the well-to-do people did not go, the poor would not. And without church, they would have no weekly lesson in good manners, to say nothing of higher things.'

"'You subscribe a million a-year to convert the niggers. You send out people you call missionaries, who live in comfortable houses, and bully and bribe the natives. I've seen them.'

"'Of course, if you've seen them bullying and bribing the natives, I can say nothing. There you have an advantage over us.'

"'All the time, you've got all your paupers at home starving, and going from bad to worse.'

"'What are we to do, Dick? People give

because they think it is right. The missionaries may be bad men, but the object is good. The societies may be badly managed, but their aim is a good one.'

"'Your charities make the people paupers: your Church helps to make them hypocrites: your poor laws make them slaves: your trading interests grind them into the dust.'

"'My dear cousin,' I said, 'don't say *your* in such a personal way. I really should be very glad if things were better. Tell me what I am to do. As for you—you have wealth; you, at least, can do something.'

"'I intend to,' he said. 'I am going to look about for a while, and then I shall start something.'

"Oh, Kate, that 'something!' When Dick appears in his character of social reformer, introducing his 'something,' I tremble for all our notions. His ideas of society are primitive and radical. Only, as he tells papa, he can't do any harm, because not five per cent. have got the pluck to think for themselves.

"I run on when I write to you, till I hardly know when to stop. I tell you everything. Don't you think people exchange their ideas and show their hearts

better on paper than in words? I sit in my own room alone, after dinner, and write like this, till I have exhausted everything that was in my head. I wonder if you really like to read my letters. Then I sit back and read it all over again, and try to ascertain, by a calm, critical perusal, whether it is worth reading. Sometimes I say—'Kate will laugh at this;' 'This is well put, young woman;' and so on—like a friendly critic, just to encourage myself.

* * * * * *

"I have just read the whole letter through again. Kate, it is much too full of Cousin Dick. That is not my fault: it is the fault of his being always here. It is also much too full of myself. It is I, I, I—all *I*s, like the prophet's creature, that he saw in his vision. I must correct this fault in my next, and make it all U, U, U, in compensation, like a churchyard orchard. You know, Kate, I should like to make it all F, F, F—ective. Ah, me! if it were not for hope I should die. Suppose we go on for years and years and years. How would it be, do you think, when we are both past sixty, to fulfil our troth and marry? Dreadful thought! Love be-

longs to youth. If Frank cannot marry me when I am young, and when he can kiss me, and fondle me for the sake of mes beaux yeux, let him not marry me at all. I would rather remain single *for his sake.* Would not you, Kate? Oh! to wait, and wait—his plighted word holding true — till my cheeks are withered and my beauty all gone, and there is nothing to remind him of the Grace he used to love; and then to feel that all the passion was dead, and nothing left but the smouldering ashes of duty! Let me marry my Frank when I am young and fair, or let me never marry at all. Farewell, dear Kate. Tell him from me—oh! what message can I send him? You are the kindest sister-in-law that ever poor girl was *going* to have. Tell him, in any guarded way that you like—not in so many words, because it is immodest and unwomanly, only it is true—that I love him—I love him—I love him; and that there can never be more than one man in all the world to me.

"Your own

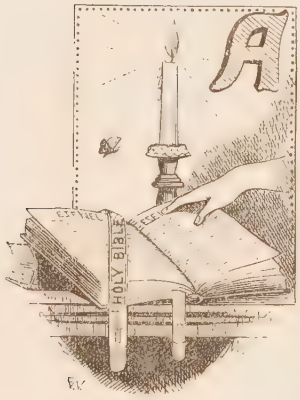
"GRACE."

The foregoing very silly and young-ladyish effusion—over which I do hope my readers will not

linger till they become critical—may be read by the light of the preceding chapter.

Those who are too captious about girls' letters will remark that there is no postscript at all in it.

CHAPTER THE SECOND.



AFTER living three or four weeks at Mrs. Skimp's, Frank made up his mind to shift his quarters. Great joy, accordingly, fell upon the inmates of the boarding-house in Granville - square, in whose opinion Mr. Melliship gave himself unbecoming airs—nobody, except old Bowker and half-witted Eddrup, being good enough company for him.

"After all, what was he?" they asked scornfully. "A singer at a music hall!"

Captain Bowker, who had never before found such a listener as Frank, was most unfeignedly sorry to see the only person in the place with an ear for poetry depart. Besides, the old fellow liked Frank, and so begged him to come and spend Sunday evenings with him, when the others were generally out. This Frank promised to do when he could, to the Captain's great relief.

The first day after he left, one or two of Mrs. Skimp's gentlemen so far plucked up courage again as to begin their persecution of Mr. Eddrup as of old. But he had a friend in the old sailor, who, taught by Frank's example, confronted his assailants with so angry a visage, and language of such briny flavour, that they reluctantly gave up their fun.

So that at Mrs. Skimp's table Frank's memory was kept green by the Captain, and the good he had effected in Mr. Eddrup's behalf was not allowed to perish.

As Mr. Leweson had sent him to Skimp's, when Frank made up his mind to leave there he mentioned the matter to him.

"You might lodge with the Silvers. They have room for somebody with them, I know," Mr. Leweson said—regretting next moment that he had

suggested it, foreboding disturbance to Patty's peace of mind.

Frank offered to become the occupant of Mr. Silver's two vacant rooms, and was accepted without demur.

He was heartily glad to escape from the noise and coarseness of Skimp's to a room of his own, where, at least, he could be alone.

Patty Silver had furnished the first floor—left empty by their last tenant—for him, not magnificently, it is true, but as well as the slender funds of the family permitted. He had a bed; and, in his sitting-room, a carpet and a table, and as many chairs as he could expect for twelve shillings a-week.

Patty cooked his dinner for him; and before he went to the Palace, he took a cup of tea with the Silvani Family; then, after he had sung his three songs, and borne the applause—which humiliated him more than singing the songs—he smoked a pipe in Mr. Silver's company before he went to bed; but as he smoked and listened, or replied in monosyllables to the prophetic discourse of the acrobat—who never talked on any subject but one—his thoughts were miles away in the past or in the future.

"The future!" he used to think, after his nightly purgatory. "How long shall I go on with it? And what next?"

He had the pleasure of sending something weekly to his mother and sister. He had the pleasure weekly of hearing of them, and of Grace. But he could not continue to sing at the Palace after his engagement was over. It was but the shift of a penniless man. All day he lived in terror lest some old friend should see him, and proclaim his disgrace—as he thought it.

Night after night he searched the sea of faces for one he knew. He never saw one. The Palace is not a place where country cousins go. The "loonatics" who patronized Mr. Leweson were all of Islington blood; unmixed Cockneys; City clerks, dressed à la mode; young shopmen, making half-a-crown purchase nearly as much dissipation as a sovereign will buy in the west; with a good sprinkling of honest citizens, fond of an evening out, neither they nor their wives averse to the smell of tobacco and the taste of beer. But no face he knew. He was as safe from discovery, under the cover of Signor Cipriano, at the Palace as he would have been in San Francisco.

Still he resolved not to stay with Mr. Lewe-

son after the two months' engagement had expired.

When he told him, Mr. Leweson sighed—

"I thought so—I always thought so. You are too good for my loonatics. Now I shall begin to advertise your last nights."

The posters came out. "Last Nights of Signor Cipriano!" in flaring capitals, stared Frank in the face from every hoarding round Islington. His fame went up by means of the bills to the breezy heights of Hampstead, to hilly Highgate, to the woods of Hornsey, and to far-off Finchley.

At his lodgings, Frank did not see very much of Patty. At tea and in the evening they met; but the girl hardly spoke. She left the talking to her father, who poured out a never-ending stream of commentary. Frank, as he listened, learned what strange shapes religion sometimes takes in a mind uneducated, but enthusiastic, simple, and imaginative.

Mr. Silver had but one desire—to spiritualize himself—to the utmost. He cared nothing what he ate and drank: except that it must be sufficient to maintain his strength. He was indifferent to his calling, come failure or come success: save that he recognized the duty of doing his best in it. He had

no fears for the future, either for himself or his children, in whom he thought he saw the "Light." A man indifferent to the world, utterly selfish, utterly *un-careful*. That his daughter should perform on the bars with himself seemed to him a matter so simple, after all the practice they had had together, that he never thought about it at all; and his own conscience being satisfied, he cared absolutely nothing about the opinion of the world.

It pleased him to have Frank with him. First, because he could talk. Talk with a man who disputes and argues is a great deal more refreshing than talk with one who accepts undoubtingly, as Patty and her brother used to do. Then Frank was cheery: he kept the children, as Mr. Silver called both Patty and Joe, alive and happy—told them stories, and made them laugh. The prophet, as Frank called him, had no objection to seeing people laugh—his religion was not a gloomy one.

I have shown how Frank sketched a portrait of Mr. Silver. But in three days after he moved into his new lodgings, he renewed his proposition to draw a portrait of Patty.

"Vanity," said the Prophet, with a smile.

"You were pleased with yours, father," urged his daughter.

"Draw her if you like, Mr. Melliship."

They had a sitting that very afternoon, in Frank's sitting-room. His easel, the table; his canvas, a large piece of rough drawing paper; his materials, chalks. He was going to draw her life-size. Mr. Silver thought there was going to be made a pencil sketch in a dozen touches, like that of himself.

Frank engaged the girl to silence, and worked away for a few mornings with a will. He only put in her head, as she refused to have her hands drawn. The poor girl was very sensitive about her disfigured hands. The likeness was perfect; but he permitted himself, with the licence of an artist, to add a few accessories. Her hair was dressed and crowned with flowers; jewels were round her neck. She was no longer Patty the acrobat, but a countess, a queen, dressed for conquest. The picture conquered Patty. Ever since Frank caught her in his arms, and saved her from death, the image of the fair-haired, sweet-spoken young man, the only gentleman she had ever spoken to, the only gentleman who had ever spoken to her, filled her foolish little brain. He came to tea with them; he came and lived with them: brought brightness into a house which had almost too much of Ezekiel about it. Then he brought flowers every day for

her, because she liked flowers ; he bought ribbons for her, because she liked a little finery ; and gloves, because her own pair were old and dirty. He paid her little attentions, meaning nothing, though she thought they meant a good deal. And so, like Margaret—type of every innocent and ignorant girl—she asked herself a dozen times a day, "He loves me—loves me not ?" He loved her not : he hardly gave her a thought, save that she was nice, pleasant to look at, pleasant to talk to. But love !

Sometimes in the mornings, when there was no rehearsal, he went for walks with her, starting early, and going up to Highgate and beyond—where there are fields and wild flowers still to be had, though London is so near. The boy went with them ; but Patty had the pleasure of talking to Frank, telling him all her little hopes ; for the girl was as confiding as innocence could make her, save when her own secret was concerned.

The portrait was framed, and hung in the room where the family ate and drank and sat. This, in spite of protests from the father—who soon, however, got into the habit of looking at the portrait of his daughter. As he looked, he said, the likeness disappeared.

One day, after gazing steadily at the picture for a long time, he exclaimed—

"I have it now. It is no longer the portrait of my daughter—it is the picture of the daughter of Jephthah."

Frank looked at his handiwork. It was, in a sense, true. Patty's features; but somehow there was in her eyes, what he had never noticed before, a look of expectancy, as of suffering to come—the tale of lamentation and sacrifice foreshadowed in her gaze. It was wonderful. His hands had done it all unawares; but it was there.

"It might stand for the daughter of Jephthah," he murmured. "But Patty's face is too bright. See, Mr. Silver," he said, as Patty looked up from her work, "there is no sadness there. You don't see any sacrifice in Patty's eyes, do you?"

Patty blushed as her father looked first at her, and then at the picture.

"It is there, the expression is there: the look of Jephthah's daughter: as well as in the portrait."

He relapsed into one of his trances, becoming now more frequent, and was silent.

Patty's face, to an outsider, certainly offered as few indications of future sorrow as many girls'. The dimples in her cheeks showed how prone she

was, by original sin, to light-heartedness and gaiety ; the clearly defined arch of her eyebrows, her clustering chestnut hair, the deep brown of her eyes, the freshness of her cheeks, pointed her out as one destined to be loved. But to all this Frank was blind. He had only one love—only one idea of womanhood.

Blind ! Blind !

For they were together during these weeks ; and day after day, Patty was drinking new draughts of intoxication and of passion. She looked at herself in the glass more than she had ever done before ; she put on the little bright bits of colour which Frank had bought her in the shape of ribands ; she lamented over her hands ; she began to be ashamed of her work. More than all, she began to be ashamed of her professional costume. She rejoiced that her performances began when Frank's were finished, and that he did not see them : she thought little of the thousands of eyes that did. All these were nothing. What did it matter what she did before the stupid public who came to see her fly through the air, and perhaps kill herself ?

"'He loves me—loves me not?' He is a gentleman, delicately nurtured. He cannot bear rough, coarse hands, pulled out of shape by hard,

unwomanly work. He loves women with accomplishments, who can write without having to think how to spell the words. He loves women who can dress in silk and satin, and put on all manner of bravery. He has some one in that upper world to which he belongs—some one whom he loves."

Or she would awake, fresh and hopeful, and radiant as the rosy-fingered dawn.

"He talked to me all day yesterday. He bought me flowers and fruit. He laughed at what I said, and called me silly. He admired my bonnet. He loves me! He loves me!"

So the little tragedy went on;—the girl trying to think that Frank loved her; the little heart beating with all the nameless hopes and fears; the eyes that watched for a sign, only the smallest sign, of love; the ears that listened for the least little vibration of passion; the cheeks that flushed when he drew near, and flushed again when he went away. And Frank and her father, callous to it all, ignorant of it, unsuspecting—each thinking of the thing that interested him most; Frank burning to get through his two months' engagement, the Prophet finding ever fresh food for his mystic imagination.

"Patty," said Frank, one morning, "one thing

always astonishes me about you. Where are your lovers? What are all the young fellows thinking of?"

She flushed scarlet. Her lovers? Alas! She had but one, and he did not love her. And only this morning she had risen so full of hope and joy, because Frank had spoken to her the day before more kindly, as she thought, than usual.

"Lovers!" she echoed, sharply. "I have none —I want none."

And went straightway to her own room, where she sobbed her eyes out.

Frank looked after her in some surprise. He had never known Patty in a temper before.

He went out to see Mr. Eddrup, knowing by this time where to find him in the morning.

Mr. Eddrup was in his court—the court which now, save one or two houses, belonged to him. It was his. In it he had organized a sort of parish, of which he was the sole minister and vicar in charge; for the parish had given it up in despair. Here he had a school; here was a chapel: here was a wash-house and baths; here, in itself complete, all the things that go to soften and ameliorate the lot of poverty. And here, for forty years, he had spent his days and nights: a long self-sacrifice,

more complete than that of the hermits of the Thebaïd, perhaps with more suffering. Here he had spent every farthing that could be snatched from the expenses of his meagre life—the money that should have clothed him well, that might have procured him comfort, and even luxury—that might have given him a position in the world. And not the money only. That was nothing. But his youth, his pride, his ambition, his passion, his dreams of love and visions of fair women—all, all were merged and sunk in this little court of twenty houses, which he found a den of thieves, and had turned into a house of prayer. Seventy years of age now—an old man, bowed and bent ; but full of zeal and energy—he went to and fro among his people. They were always sinning, and always being punished, because the poor get punished in this world more than the rich. They were always in distress, out of work, out of health, behind with everything ; and they looked to him for everything —for help, advice, consolation. He gave them what he had. For money ; he lent it, at no interest. They paid him back when they were able. Advice, consolation, experience, he gave them for nothing. It was his metier to give.

Not to give money : that was his rule. Not to

pauperize the people. To avoid the mistakes of the Church; to make people provident; to help them in their efforts; to trust in their honesty, and to make them honest by trusting them. To teach especially the things that belong to poor people—the virtues, not of obedience and contentment, which are servile virtues, but of moderation, cleanliness, and good temper. This was his method. He neither wrote nor agitated; but found a little spot in this great London, and set himself to improve it. Presently, as it became improved, came the necessity for religion. Then he made himself their leader, and held services for prayer and praise, where every one might speak the thing that was in him. The people respected themselves; they respected their friend and teacher more.

Frank found him at the entrance of the court, preparing to slip away, in his noiseless and shy way, along the streets to Skimp's, in Granville-square. Frank offered him his arm, and walked with him. The old man was very silent, as usual.

It was not by any means their first meeting in this way. Once or twice a week Frank came round to the court at three o'clock, the time when Mr. Eddrup's work was generally over, and walked home with him. They seldom talked much. But

the old man's heart had warmed to Frank. He was the only one, for forty years, who had brought his youth and cheerfulness across his path; the only gentleman — and Mr. Eddrup's heart still warmed to gentlemen—who had crossed his weary path: always excepting Captain Hamilton and the medical students of Skimp's.

To-day, he said not a word till they reached the door of Skimp's.

"You asked me, some time since," he began, abruptly, pausing with the latch key in his hand, "why I live this life. Come in, and I will tell you."

There was no one in the drawing-room. Mr. Eddrup sat down at the open window, and passed his hand across his brow.

"Forty years," he murmured—"forty years. I am like the children of Israel in the wilderness. It is a long time. But it will soon be over. A few more months, or days, and my work will be done. Mr. Melliship, you have told me your story. It is a sad one—it is a very sad one. But you have one consideration—the greatest: it is not your fault that you are poor. You can look the world in the face and laugh at it, because you are innocent. I asked you to look at my forehead. Look again.

Is there not the seal of guilt upon it? The mark of Cain? Look close. Do not think to spare me."

He threw back his long white locks with a gesture of despair.

"I see nothing," said Frank, "but the reverend white hairs of a good man."

Mr. Eddrup sighed.

"I will tell you. I knew I must tell it before I died," he said. "I don't ask you to keep my secret. All the world may know it again, as they did before. I shall some day — soon—tell my people: whenever I feel strong enough, I mean," he said, correcting himself hastily—"whenever I feel less cowardly, and able to do so. Mr. Mellish, I am nothing better than a convicted thief! You shrink—you shrink from me. See how quickly this veil of reputation drops off!"

"Mr. Eddrup, I did not shrink. What you have been, matters not. The thing is, what you are."

"What I am—what I am!" he repeated. "What am I? A hypocrite, who wears a mask—a man who goes about the world under false pretences. See—see this—read it."

He took from his pocket-book part of a worn

newspaper, yellow with age, ragged at the edges. An old *Times*, dated July the 8th, 1825. Frank half opened it, and then gave it back.

"I don't want to read it. Why should I? Mr. Eddrup, you who preach of Faith and Charity, have you forgotten Hope?"

"It is more than forty years ago. I was poor. I was burning with zeal and ambition. I longed to distinguish myself. I had talents — not great talents, but some ability. But I was too poor to make myself known. I wanted to go into the world, and get friends. Then a terrible temptation assailed me. I was beset with it night and day. I had no rest. The voice of the tempter woke me at night, and kept me feverish all the day. It said, 'Use it, use it—no one will know. Presently, you will have money, and you will replace it.' Trust money! I waited, and listened to the tempting voice. The years passed by. I was nearly thirty. I used it. It is forty years ago; but even now the memory of that day, and the misery I felt when my self-respect was gone, haunt me till I know not whether it is repentance or the gnawing of the worm that never dies. I used the money—for my own purposes."

Great beads stood upon his forehead as he made

his confession. He was silent again for a space.

Frank held his breath.

"After a year they found it out. I had not yet been able to replace the money. They arrested me. It made some noise. They tried to get me off; but it was all too clear. I had six months' imprisonment, and came out into a world which was dark to me for the future. I was poor when I became a felon. I was rich when I came out of prison. One of my relatives had died, leaving me all his money—having forgotten, I believe, to alter his will. I paid back the money I had stolen. I hid myself for a year, in despair and misery, creeping out at night. What should I do with my life? I thought that I would bury myself in solitude, and try to do some secret good: not in atonement, young man, remember—I never thought that. Nothing that man can do will ever atone. The evil remains. It is his misery sometimes to see the evil that he has begun work its steady way upward, like a tree that he has planted. Sometimes, if he does not see it, he *feels* it."

"Is repentance nothing? Is a life of good works nothing?"

Mr. Eddrup shook his head.

"What I never shake off from myself is the feeling that one *never forgets*. I want an assurance of a river of Lethe. I want, not to be forgiven so much as to forget—not so much to escape punishment, as to hold up my head again. Punishment, pain, suffering—what does it mean? Nothing, nothing. But self-respect. Can—will Heaven give back that? Preachers tell us of sins forgiven: they say nothing of honour restored. A Heaven of Praise, with my brother sinners, because we have escaped punishment, would be no Heaven for me. I want more. It is the assurance of that perfect forgiveness which restores as well as pardons that I want. Young man, pray, night and morning, and all day long, that you may not be led into temptation."

He dropped his face into his hands; and Frank, meek and silent before this revelation and sorrow, slipped quietly away and left him.

CHAPTER THE THIRD.

THE summer passes into autumn: the woods of Hunslope Park are tinged with yellow. Dick Mortiboy, leaving Lafleur to work out the System alone, lingers at his villa. He has bought horses and traps; he rides about the country; he knows every village, and nearly every man in it, for miles round Market Basing; he gives dinners to his tenants; receives all his clients, from Lord Hunslope downwards, with the same affability; throws away his money—the Mortiboy money, gotten with so much labour and pains—with an easy prodigality endearing him to all that large class of mankind which admires generosity when it flows towards itself. But for one thing, his popularity would be perfect.

Dick will go to no private parties. They lay traps for him; publicly invite him to dinner; catch him by the button-hole, and try to inveigle him into an engagement; lead him to the doors of their houses, and almost drag him in. But Dick won't go. One house alone he frequents: his cousins'—the Heathcotes'. Is he paying attention to one of the girls? A serious question to the ladies of Market Basing. If so, it must be Grace—that designing young girl who used to flirt with Frank Mellishp, and threw him over when he was ruined. It can't be Lucy, who hasn't spirit enough even to look in the face of a man. He may be paying his attentions to one of the girls, but it is difficult to tell which.

And all this time, Dick is fighting a battle with himself. He went at first to Parkside because he liked to talk freely, and it was the only house, he thought, in his ignorance of the world, where people would not laugh at his rough speech. Fancy the world presuming to laugh at a man with half a million and more of money! He goes now—though he knows he ought not—because he likes to go there only too well. He has never dared—strong and brave as he is—to meet his thought face to face; but secretly there is growing up within him a passionate desire to be free: to shake

off the yoke of Polly, and to seize for his own his cousin Grace. He is beginning to break it down, this growing passion.

Grace, meantime, unsuspicious of his altered feelings, treats him with the same perfect freedom she might show to her own brother. But her mother was right—Dick Mortiboy loved her.

"I do wonder, Dick," she said sometimes, "how we should have managed to get on without you. What a good fellow you were to come home as you did, just at the time when you were most wanted, when we should have been left so lonely. I think we shall civilize you by degrees. Already you've left off some of your bad habits. Don't you think he's improved, Lucy? Women have some use in the world, Dick, however you may despise them."

"I don't despise them."

"They polish men and things. Jane, the housemaid, polishes the dining-room table; her mistresses polish their cousin Dick. I don't know which is the pleasanter task."

They went out for drives in his dogcart—Grace in front, Lucy behind. Then he sat silent, and let Grace prattle to him. Or they went out for long rides with him, and were fain to confess that Dick rode better even than Frank.

"Are you girls happy?" he asked once, in an abrupt way.

"Why, Dick?"

"I can't make it out. You lead such quiet lives. You never go away anywhere. You see no strange faces—you have no excitement—you know nothing. I hardly call it life."

"Perhaps we like quiet lives, Dick," said Lucy.

"No, we don't, Dick," said Grace. "What we are taught from our infancy is to be content with quiet lives, because we shall never get anything else. I should like to go about the world and see things. I should like to have a little peril—just a little, you know—to talk about afterwards. And I should like to see the beautiful places in the world that you talk about."

"I don't know," said Lucy—"I like being here best. I hope to stay here all my life. We are happy, are we not, Grace?" caressing her sister, whose temperament was so different from her own.

"Happy? Yes—I suppose so. Don't you know, Cousin Dick, that it is always prudent to confine your wishes within the probability of their accomplishment? That seems a very wise thing to say—but I saw it in a book the other day. The

learned author went on to remark, that if you wisely wished for what was most likely to happen to you, and prayed night and morning for it to come, you would, in all probability, and provided you had faith enough, get what you prayed for."

"Grace, dear, don't."

But Grace went on.

"As for me, I am not so happy as I should like to be. Not because my life is dull; but—oh! quite another thing—because, you see, I am wishing and praying for what does not come. That is the only change I want. And, oh! dear, it is a terrible great change to ask. Are you happy, Dick?"

"Pretty well. There are one or two things that bother me as I lie in my hammock at night."

"You would like poor Uncle Richard to get well again," said Lucy.

"No, that is not one of them. Of course I should, Lucy. But that is not one of them."

"Can we help you, Dick?" said Grace.

"No, I hardly think you can. But let me help you, if I may."

"Some day, Dick, I mean to ask you, perhaps."

She held out her hand frankly. At the touch of her slender fingers, the great, solid-looking man

fairly trembled and shook. But Grace was gone, and he turned moodily away.

Was he paying attention? Was he in love with his cousin? Was he letting the thought of her dwell in his mind day after day, till it became a power almost too great to be resisted?

About two miles from Market Basing stands, on a small eminence, a cross—one of the crosses erected by Edward the First in honour of Queen Eleanor. It is placed at the side of the road, and, standing on its steps, you have a wide and very pretty view of Market Basing, and the surrounding meadows. On a platform of red sandstone, in seven steps, is the cross itself, about forty feet high. The lowest part is octagonal, bearing on its sides, much defaced, the arms of Castille and Leon, and Ponthieu in Picardy. Above this is another small tower of twelve feet. Every other side of this tower contains a crowned female figure, defaced, but not yet destroyed by time. This is surmounted by a small four-sided tower, on which is a marble cross, formerly gilt. It had been old Mr. Mortiboy's favourite drive. He would get down from John Heathcote's dogcart—for it was on the road to Parkside—and, leaving him standing in the road, would climb the

steps, and contemplate the town and his property lying beneath him. When he was a younger man, he used to walk out and back.

Dick, one afternoon in September, was driving Grace Heathcote home in his dogcart. She had come to town with her father, who had business to detain him later.

As they passed the cross, Grace pointed it out to him.

"Your father used to be so fond of standing on the steps, and looking at the town, Dick. Let us get down and see the view. You can count your houses with your finger, as he used to do."

"I don't much care for views, and I don't want to count my houses," said Dick. "But you always have your own way."

"There is no use in being a woman unless you have it, is there?"

"Lead the horse to the top of the hill, walk him down, and wait for us, Bob."

They stood on the steps of the old cross: Grace on the top step, and Dick one or two steps lower.

"Look, Dick—look, is it not beautiful?"

A beautiful landscape of peace and plenty, lit up with an autumn sun, can make things beautiful. Dick turned for a moment to the scene, but his

eyes went back to Grace. The girl touched him on the shoulder, and bade him look for his own house. A second time, at her touch, Dick trembled and shivered. For she had never looked so lovely.

"Don't, Grace," he said, in a constrained voice. He was exerting all his strength to prevent himself from taking the slight and delicate figure in his arms, and crushing it to his heart. "Don't, Grace. Don't touch me."

"Why not, Dick!"

"Because I love you, Grace. Because I cannot bear it any longer."

The girl shrank back in momentary dread. For his eyes were fixed on her, and had a hungry, yearning look—a wild look.

They heard no sound in the air, save the song of a lark above them, and the crunching of the gravel made by the horse's hoofs and the wheels of the dogcart. Another sound there was: but they were both deaf: the sound of voices—a woman's voice.

"Where's your master, Bob?"

"Nigh the cross, with Miss Grace."

Bob went on; and the woman, stepping on the grass by the wayside, noiselessly went on till she came to the cross. Then she slipped behind it, and listened.

"I love you, Grace," Dick went on. "I tell you that I have fought against it, because Lucy told me something—I half forget. There is another. What do I care about any other man? There is no man in the world I am afraid of."

"Do you think women are to be fought for, Dick? You are not in Texas now."

"Forgive me. I'm only a common and a rough man, Grace, my—my darling." She shrank farther back. The woman behind gave a little hiss, and clenched her fists. "I'm not fit to speak to a girl like you. If you knew all, you would say so yourself. But I can't help myself, Grace. I swear I can't help myself. Look here: if you touch me, I shake all over. Yet I am not happy except I am near you. If you speak to me, I tingle with pleasure. If you knew, Grace—if you only knew, what a wild beast is in me now, telling me to take you in my arms, and kiss, and kiss, and kiss you again, you would run away shrieking."

"I'm not afraid of you, Cousin Dick."

But she was.

"The devil and all of it is, you see, Grace," he went on after a pause, during which he was wrestling with and getting the better of his wild beast—"the devil of it is—I'm glad, after all, that I have

told you, because now things will be easier—that I could not even ask you to marry me."

"You know, Dick, that it would be useless if you could."

"I know. The other—boy—Frank—Melliship—I know."

He sat down on the lower step, and crunched his heel into the grass.

"If you knew all, I said—yes, if you knew all, I think you would—pity—me, Grace. If I could only find something to say that would make you love me! If I could only make you understand—only I can't talk as some men can—how I long for you, how I curse the—the cause that keeps me from hoping ever to marry you."

"Dick, I never—never could marry you."

"But I should have a chance—at least, I should think so—if it were not for her, Grace." He started to his feet, and stretched out his arms to her wildly. "Grace, what does all the world matter, and what they think or say? See, I love you, I will fight for you, and—and worship you all my life. I am rich, I will give you anything that you like to ask. The world over there is far more beautiful than here. Come away with me. We will build a house in California, in a spot I like well. The sun is always

bright there. Grace, come with me. I am a man; I am not a puny stripling like Frank Mellishp. Men know me, and are afraid of me. But *I*—I, my girl, am afraid of no man in the word—no man. Roaring Dick is king wherever he goes!"

He was mad with passion. His eyes were aglow with a strange fire, his voice was harsh and hoarse. He made a movement towards the shrinking and terrified girl, with outstretched arms. Grace shrieked, and fell back against the cross.

Then between them stepped the listening woman.

"No," she cried—"no, Grace Heathcote: leave me my husband, at least. Take his rings and his presents, hear his fine speeches—you may have them; but you sha'n't have *him*. Not that—not that. Leave him to me. He is mine—mine: my handsome Dick. You think you will get away from your Polly. Not you, my lad, not you. Not yet—not yet."

She had been drinking: her face was flushed and red; she wore a coarse country dress; she was frowsy and heated; her voice was thick. Good heavens! what a contrast to the sweet and delicate girl who stood above her on the steps, white and frightened.

"Pretty things for a wife to hear—very pretty

things, upon my word. And as for you, you young minx—"

Here Dick laid his heavy hand on her shoulder, and swung her round. She looked up at him, in her rage and fury, with parted lips and flaming cheeks. Her husband was pale and calm, save for the trembling of his lips.

His eyes met hers.

You know how, in the Festin de St. Pierre, the statue of the Commandant lays his irresistible hand upon the shoulder of Don Juan. At its cold touch, the bravado and courage go out of the man. As it weighs him down, he sinks lower and lower, till the earth closes over him.

At the first touch of Dick's hand, Polly trembled. When he turned her round, and she read, not wrath, but a cold, pitiless determination in his face, her rage died out suddenly, and she became cold all over. She dropped her eyes. He looked at her steadily for a few moments, and then said, in a husky voice—

"Go away from this, Polly. Keep out of my way—you'd best—for the present."

The woman went on her way down the hill without a word.

Grace sat down, and buried her face in her

hands. She forgot her own terror in her sorrow for Dick. Across his face had flashed, for a moment only, a look of misery and shame that cut her to the heart.

"Oh! Cousin Dick—Cousin Dick," she cried, bursting into tears—"I am so sorry."

"Forgive me, Grace," he said, quietly. "Forgive me. I get mad sometimes, you know. I was mad then. Tell me you forgive me."

She held out her hand. In truth, she had never caught the meaning of his words. How should she know what they meant?

He took her hand in his, and kept it.

"I was only nineteen when I married her. Even then there was no excuse for me. But she made me do it. I took her up to London, when my father sent me to work at our town agent's. We were married in St. Pancras Church. Then I left home, was turned out by my father—all my fault, Grace, not his, remember that—and I left her. Till the time I came home again, I never thought of her. Now I have to pay her to keep silence. Pity me, Grace."

"I do pity you, Dick—I pity you from my heart."

"I said what I ought not, my child. I said I

loved you. That is true. You will always remember that I loved you, will you not? As long as I live, I shall love you. But you may trust me, Grace. I shall never offend you again. For I can never ask you to marry me."

"And, oh, Dick—oh, Cousin Dick, you won't try to do any harm to Frank?"

"Frank Mellishipp? I'm not the man, Grace. Marry whom you like. I will help you—that is, if I can."

She laid her hand in his once more. He looked down at her: the passion faded out of his deep black eyes — eyes now soft and tender as a woman's.

"Go, Grace. Keep my secret. I must stay here awhile, and think. Go home without me, my child."

"I am afraid—of *her*, Dick."

"She *dares* not touch you. By ——!" — he clenched his fists—"but I will walk with you to the top of the hill, and see you safe with Bob."

"Good-bye, Dick. Don't do anything dreadful. Oh! I am so afraid you should." Then she added, almost in a whisper, "Don't be cruel to *her*."

They parted: she with a heart full of new and

strange sympathies and sorrows ; he subdued and heavy-laden.

He pulled out his cigar case, and smoked for above an hour, sitting on the steps of the old cross. Then the sun got low, and he got up and walked homewards.

At the foot of the rising ground on which the cross stands runs the river which winds down the plain, and flows between his father's house in Derngate and his own little villa. He took the towing-path, and followed it moodily. It was a very lonely path : few people walked there by day, and none by night. The barges have all left it long since, and the deserted stream flows along, broad and deep, between the trees which overhang it on either side.

Presently, before him in the path, he saw his wife. She had been drinking again, since he sent her away, to drown her fears ; and now she stood in the way before him, facing him, with her arms akimbo, and a loud, defiant laugh.

"So you've done your fine talk with Grace Heathcote at last, and now you're coming to beg my pardon, I suppose."

Dick grew purple with passion. He seized her by the waist in his mighty arms, and, without say-

ing a single word, raised her aloft, and threw her—heavy as she was — six feet and more into the river. With a shriek, the woman fell into the deepest part of the stream, and disappeared.

Dick's wrath, when there was no opposition to feed it, was as short-lived as a straw-fire. He looked at the rings of water widening round the spot where Polly had fallen in, with an expression which rapidly changed from extreme rage to one more like extreme vexation.

"Carambo!" he cried—"what if I've drowned her?"

But he might have spared himself his anxiety. The cold water sobered her in a moment; and rising from the mud at the bottom, into which her head had at first plunged, she came to the surface. Ten feet lower down, a fallen tree lay half across the stream. The current bore her on before she had time to sink again. She clutched the branches which bent and ducked her again and again. But at last she landed herself, and clambering up the bank, wet and dripping, turned in fury upon her lord and master.

Dick was sitting on the grass, laughing as if it was the best joke he had ever known in his life.

"I told you how it would be, Polly, if you split. Now you see. Lord! if you could only get a sight of your own face!"

She had risen from the waves, like Venus Anadyomene. Encumbered as she was with her draggled clothes, she only resembled the goddess in that one fact. Besides the mud at the bottom, which was still in her hair and bonnet, she had collected a goodly quantity of duckweed on her way out of the water, which hung in graceful festoons upon her shoulders.

"You'd better go home to your mother and get dry, Polly."

"I'll cry all over Market Basing that I'm your wife. I'll have revenge, you black, murdering villain. I'll have my rights out of you, I will."

"Then, Polly, perhaps next time you go into the river, you will stay there."

Dick strode off alone, leaving his wife on the other side.

When he got home, he bolted the door, so that her key was of no use.

About ten o'clock, a little gravel was thrown up at his window. It was Polly, crying.

"Dick, let me in—let me in, Dick. I'm very sorry, and I haven't told nobody—on my sacred

word, I haven't. I said I'd been a blackberryin', and fell in."

Dick poked an unrelenting head out of the window. At sight of it, his wife put her handkerchief to her face and sobbed loudly.

"Polly," said the inhuman Dick, "you may go to the devil."

Polly went home. She arose early next morning, and repaired again, trembling, to the house. But she might just as well have gone defiantly, for Dick Mortiboy was off to town by the six o'clock train.

CHAPTER THE FOURTH.

MAS the old novelists used to say, to Paragon-place, Gray's Inn-road. This pleasant retreat lies on the east side of the road, not very far from the lordly entrance to Gray's Inn. Paragon-place is a *cul de sac;* and as it consists only of six houses in all, it passes a peaceful and quiet existence, having but little intercourse with the outer world. It consists of a single row of five houses, with another at the end, looking down the court. They

face a paved alley of ten feet in breadth. The northern side of Paragon-place is bounded by a brick wall, eight feet high, set about and garnished, for the better protection of the inhabitants, by a plentiful top-dressing of broken bottles. The wall may also serve as a protection to the printer's offices which lie beyond. At all events, it is a barrier insuperable between Paragon-place and the printers. Thus fashion separates itself from business: leisure and retirement from compulsory work.

I would that we might linger over Paragon-place and its inhabitants. About every house there hang half a dozen histories; from the tale of every dweller might be woven a romance of real life—that is, a tale of sin and suffering, of poverty and sorrow. We have to do with one only. It is the third tenement in the row. Like the rest, it consists of three main rooms, lighted each "fore and aft"—the front window looking into the court, the back commanding a view of a small yard beyond, about six feet square, containing a water-butt and a heap of rubbish.

There is a staircase leading to two rooms, one over the other, above. On the left hand of the door, as you go in, is a sort of closet or small room, which may be used as a bedroom when the family

overflows the rest of the house. It is lighted and ventilated by an aperture giving space for a single pane of glass.

The doors of the houses, which were once painted green, but long years since, stand open. Everything about the court is intolerably dirty. Odds and stray bits of vegetables, as cabbage stalks, potato peelings, and such small wreck and *débris*, lie about the stones; a gutter runs along the wall, down which is merrily flowing, at this moment, the bucket of soapsuds which No. 1 has just emptied into it. Two children, having hastily constructed a model ship out of a splinter of wood, have launched it upon this river, and are watching its progress down the tributary stream to the great Mississippi of Gray's Inn-road. They run out with it into the street, and stay there. Then the court is quiet again, except for the pulse of the steam press, which is never silent. The sun shines on the windows of the printers' office, and is reflected back on the doorstep of No. 3, where sits, basking in its warmth, a figure, muffled as if it were winter, and smoking a long clay pipe. He is apparently bent and doubled up, from the effects of age: his shoulders stoop, and his back is rounded. On his head is a soft felt hat, much too large for him,

which flaps down on the side nearest the door, but is lifted up on the other side to catch the sun. A crutch is beside him. In his hand is a copy of the day before yesterday's *Daily Telegraph;* and he is reading aloud, slowly and painfully, making comments as he goes—not running so much as crawling—to his companion, a child of nine or ten, who is sitting on the stones, with his back against the wall, in the reflected sunlight. The boy's head is bare: his feet are bare. One sleeve of his jacket is quite gone, the other nearly. His trousers are all rents and tatters, his white legs gleaming through the holes. His shirt will no longer button, and shows signs of approaching dissolution. All this is a trifle, because the weather is warm; and rags are just as comfortable in warm weather as anything else. Besides, the boy has not been brought up in a school which teaches the cultivation of personal appearance by means of sartorial art. He was far more interested in the problem of how to satisfy that raging wolf which every day gnawed at his stomach, and instigated him to get food by any means.

"So you see, Bill," said the politician, in a thin, quavering voice, "the Guv'ment's gorn and done it agen, and the country's goin' to the devil. Now, if I was in the 'Ouse—"

He stopped and folded his paper.

"Don't go into the 'Ouse, Thoozy," said the child.

"It's not the work'us, stoopid. It's the House of Parlyment. Some day I think I shall go—to represent Finsbury. I wish there was the price of a half-pint in my pocket. Who's the swell coming up the court?"

The "swell," who was looking inquiringly up and down the court, seeing the pair outside the door, turned his steps in their direction.

"Can you tell me"—he spoke to the smoker, whose face was hidden by the flapping hat—"if a Mrs. Kneebone lives about here?"

He removed his pipe from his mouth, and his great hat from his head, and stood upright in the doorway, waving his hand with an air of authority.

Dick Mortiboy looked at him in astonishment. Behind the wrinkles and lines of age lay—not the colour, because the face was perfectly pale and colourless; nor the shape, because the cheeks were sunken and the features prominent; nor the comeliness, because the whole figure was starved and pinched; nor the redundant locks, because the scattered hairs, nearly white, lay sparse and thin about his temples — but an indescribable *look* of youth.

He was about four feet and a half in height: but then he stooped a good deal. He had on a long, coarse coat, made for a grown man. His legs were cased in winter trousers. He had a thick flannel shirt, and a wrapper round his neck. His chest was flattened in—his legs bowed—his body bent. Dick, standing before him on the stones, stared at him without speaking. He had never seen this kind of creature before.

"When you *think* you'll recognize me again," said the boy, sarcastically, "p'raps you'll let me know."

"It *is* a boy, by gad," said Dick.

The child previously addressed as Bill set up a yell of delight, clapping his hands and dancing round. It was as good fun as he ever assisted at. The other relaxed from his sternness of expression, conceding an aged smile to the frivolities of the situation.

"Are you a boy, or are you a man?" asked Dick. "What's your name? Tell me something about yourself."

"You can read, I suppose?" said the nondescript, with a patronizing air. "You *can* do that much, I presume. Young Bill, the writin' materials. Give the old man his bit o' whitin'."

Bill produced a piece of chalk from his trousers' pocket.

"Here y'are, Thoozy. Hooray!"

Thoozy inspected the "materials" with care, and looked for a point. This—in what mathematicians would describe as a rough eikosihedron, or twenty-sided solid—was difficult to find; but selecting something which would suit, he marched gravely down the steps, and, turning the sleeve of his coat up to his elbow, while he supported his long tails under the left arm, raised his right hand to the brick wall. Then he stopped, and turned round again.

"You *can* spell?" he said to Dick, looking at him sideways, as if with suspicion, but always with an eye on Bill.

Dick nodded.

"*And* read? Because I'm not going to take all this trouble for nothink, you know."

Little Bill screamed, and rolled himself over and over upon the cabbage stalks. Thoozy, with one eye on his young companion, proceeded slowly with his talk.

"Then," he said, stepping back, and admiring the effect of the sunlight upon his strokes, "there's a C, and a OO, and a EK. If that don't spell

Cook, that aint my name, and Methoosalem aint my natur."

"Oh, lord," cried Bill, "aint he a fizzer!"

Dick Mortiboy took the cigar out of his mouth, and contemplated the pair with an expression in which curiosity had the best part.

"So you're Mr. Methoosalem, are you? Pray, is this Bill—little Bill?"

"That *is* Bill, mister," said Thoozy, "and a very good little Bill he is. *I* educated that there boy. Bill, show the gentleman what you can do: the Catherine Wheel, my child."

He had resumed his commanding position on the doorstep, and issued his orders with a wave of the pipe, like the director of a circus using his whip.

The boy went through the graceful performance known among his friends of the pavement as the Catherine Wheel. "Hoop-là!" he cried, bringing up his bare and dirty feet within an inch of Dick's waistcoat.

"*I* taught him the Wheel," said Thoozy. "I'm too old to do it myself. He learned the 'Hoop-là!' hisself the night we got hold of two gallery checks for the Gaiety Theatre. He learnt that there of a fine gal—a dooced fine gal, sir. If I was a younger

man—" here he stopped and winked, with a sigh. "Now, Bill, the Inwerted Column."

"Never mind the Inverted Column," said Dick. "Here's a shilling for you, Bill. Go and get something to eat,"

"Half a pint will be enough for me, William," cried the other, grandly, relighting his pipe. "And get a penn'orth o' belly-ache for yourself first. Plums that is, sir," he explained to Dick.

"How old *are* you, may I ask?" said Dick.

"Eighty-six I am—a great age. I was seventy when I was born, sixteen years ago. And I've been getting older ever since. My old woman in there is only seventy-five."

"Who is your old woman?"

"Here she is—Mrs. Kneebone, sir, herself: the lady you was axing after. Not my wife, you know, nor yet my mother, nor my grandmother. Come out, old woman. Here's a gentleman wants you to drink his health."

She was as withered and wrinkled as Methoosalem himself, but without his look of childhood. In her hand she held a wooden snuffbox, from which ever and anon she refreshed herself. She wore a dress of some kind of stuff, black in colour, and a bonnet on her head which might once have had

some shape. At present it had none. An old woman who muttered as she went along: a creature who would have been burned as a witch in the merry old days: an evil-looking, miserable old woman.

She shaded her eyes from the sun, and peered up at the stranger.

"I don't know you, sir. I can't let you in. I never saw you before. You can't come in here."

"What are yer talking about?" said Thoozy. "Who said the gentleman did know you? Who talked about comin' in? Yah! He wants to have five minutes of your lively society, and he wants to look at you. You aint none too pretty, neither."

"I want some information, for which I am willing to pay," said the stranger.

"About how long ago, sir?" asked the old woman, with a look of terror at the boy.

"About twelve years ago."

"What about twelve years ago?" She shook all over.

"That's when I begin to remember plain," said the boy. "Go ahead, sir — I can answer your questions. Old lady, cut it. Now go, d'yer hear?"

"Thoozy, my dear, be careful," she said, in a trembling voice. "Oh, be careful."

"Cut it, I say. Careful, indeed! Now then, sir. You can't have a more quieter and more genteeler spot than Paragon-place on a warm day in September, about two o'clock p.m., in the afternoon. The haristocracy is gone to the seaside, and there's no one to interrupt us. Fire away with your questions."

He put his hands in his pockets, and sat down on the doorstep again.

"First, then, that child. You said his name was Bill. Bill what?"

"Lord help you! He aint got no other name. Now, sir, *do* you think — I asks you as a stranger —do you think it *can* be done for the money? Where's your profit? That's what I say. Where's your profit to come from out of five bob a-week?"

He stuck his thumbs in his arm-holes, and looked as sagacious as a publisher.

"Who brought him here? How old is he? Who does he belong to?"

"A-hem! As a proprietor of this yer hospital, and, I may say, the resident physician, I holds out my hand, and I says, says I, How much?"

"Isn't Mrs. Kneebone the proprietor?"

"On'y in the heyes of the bobby. If anything goes wrong, the coroner holds his inquidge round the corner, and Kneebone she goes before 'em and swears. I sits at home and smokes my pipe."

"Good. Tell me all about the boy. Here's a sovereign down, and five more if the inquiry leads me to anything I want."

"How do I know what you want?"

"That's just it. You don't know, and so you can't tell lies."

"Don't be too sharp, young feller, else you might fall down, though you are so big, and cut a hole in the pavin' stones. Bill was brought here, a three-weeks' baby, just nine year and a half ago. There was the devil's own trouble to keep him goin'; and he wouldn't have been kep' goin' at all, only his mother come round herself every day."

"What was the name of his mother? Nine years and a-half ago? Who was his mother?"

"Polly Tresler."

Dick gave a low whistle.

"You're sure of it? You would swear it? You are *certain* of the date?"

"Take my dick on all the Bibles in the jug.

Ask the old woman. Here, mother, come out again!"

She hobbled out.

"Now then, old lady, tell the gentleman how old Bill is. Show him your book. She's got a book, sir, and puts 'em all down."

"I'll show him that page," said Mrs. Kneebone, looking suspicious, "but no more, for five shillings."

It was a sort of register she brought him, covering about twenty years. She turned over the pages slowly, and at last arrived at her date.

"There you are, sir. Read it, but don't look at no more."

Dick read—

"Nov. 5, 1860. Boy—three weeks old—to be called Bill. Eighteenpence a-week. Mother's name and address, Miss Tresler"—(here an old address had been scratched out, and a new one substituted)—"P. T., Post-office, Market Basing,"

Dick's eye ran down the list on the page. There were about half a dozen in the year. To four of their names was written the word, "Dead." To one, "Taken away by his father." Bill made the sixth.

"And that boy, sir, he've been the apple of my eye. He have indeed."

Thoozy winked, and jerked his pipe, which he had resumed, over his left shoulder, to indicate that his partner, or Principal Nurse of the Hospital, was practising a little amiable deception. She went on without noticing.

"The clothes he's had o' me; the pocket money he's had o' me; the oranges and apples, and—and —and the tripe he's had: it's what you wouldn't believe, sir. A beautiful breakfast he got only this morning."

"Kinchined a kid and collared a bloater in the gutter," interposed Thoozy.

"Now, don't you tell no lies. A idle, good-for-nothin' vagabond, as won't work, and won't do nothin' but smoke and drink."—(Here Bill arrived with a cargo of plums and a pint of beer, which Thoozy tackled on the spot.)—"It's ten years, sir, if you'll believe me, and I wish-a-ma-die if it ain't gawspel, that that boy said he was gettin' too old to work, and hasn't done a stroke since, but eat up all he can lay his hands to."

"Ten years!" said Thoozy. "So it is. I was only seventy-six then. I made a curious discovery. mister"—here he winked sideways at the old woman

—"a very curious discovery; and I thought I'd make the most of it. On the strength of that there discovery, I'm a-goin' to spend my old age in a honourable retirement, as they says in the papers."

The old woman moved her lips, but said nothing.

"About this boy, now?" said Dick, in reply, "Here he is. If you've given him clothes, old woman, he's worn 'em out; and if you've given him grub, it hasn't agreed with him. Here, let me come in, and I'll take down all you've got to say. Is there such a thing in the house as a table, and paper and pens? Don't be afraid, I'm not going to do you any harm."

He pushed by the woman, who tried to stop him, and passed in. The entrance to the house was like the entrance to Hades, as seen by Æneas, when, aided by the Sibyl, he undertook that perilous adventure of his — "for there were straightway heard cries, and wailing loud, and the spirits of infants weeping."

Dick pushed open a door, and looked in. There were lying on the floor, in sheets and flannels, four babies, from a few weeks to a year old; one or two clutching at life with strong and eager little fists; one or two meagre, thin, and emaciated. The old

woman bustled by, and began to apply feeding bottles with great assiduity.

Dick looked at Thoozy with disgust.

"This is your precious hospital, is it, yon little imp? Have you got another room?"

"There's my room and Bill's, up at the top—let's go there. Bill, run and fetch the gentleman a bit of paper, and a pen, and a penn'orth of ink. Upstairs, sir."

The stairs were horribly, fearfully dirty and noisome. Creeping things were on the walls. The bannisters were broken away; and on the top floor, where the boys slept, the planking of the stairs had been taken up to be burned for firewood.

There was no furniture in the room except a table, and a bed spread on the floor. Thoozy sat on the bed, and looked wistfully at his quiet guest.

"You don't want to do no harm to Bill, do you, sir?" speaking quite naturally, and like a boy. "You won't hurt he, will you? 'cos Bill's the only friend I got. The other boys laughs at me: says I'm too old to live long, and asks how long ago I was born, you see. But Bill, he was a right good sort, and we've slep' together ever since he left off pap. My boy, Bill is."

"I won't hurt him, but I shall take him away from here."

"If it's best for him, I shan't say nothink. Don't believe that 'ere old woman, sir. I would work if I could. But I can't. I'm too weak, and nobody won't have nothink to say to a baby farm-boy. I tried sellin' papers in the streets, and cigar lights; but the stronger boys pushed me about. I aint strong, sir. Look at my legs." He pulled up his trousers, and showed a leg about half as thick as Dick's wrist. "And I'll tell you something more about Polly, too, sir, if you'll be good to Bill. She was married lawful to Bill's father, 'cos I heard her tell the old woman so. He was a sailor, he was. And he went to sea. You aint the man, are you, sir?"

Dick started. Here, indeed, was news worth having.

"You boy, find out that man's name, and keep a quiet tongue in your head, and I'll help you all round—except to find work, which is the only thing you can't get in this blessed old country."

"The old woman knows his name. I'll get it for you, never fear. She's afraid of me, she is, since I found her out. But she won't do it again, she won't."

"What is it you found out?"

"Here comes Bill," said Thoozy. "And the old woman, too——"

Dick pulled out five pounds, and laid them on the table.

"Now, Mrs. Kneebone, let us understand one another. This is for your information, provided it proves correct and true on subsequent investigation."

The old woman eyed the gold greedily.

She began her statement, which was in substance precisely the same as Thoozy had made; gave the dates exactly from her book; explained how the baby had been left with her at a charge of eighteenpence a week, increased first to half-a-crown, and of late months to five shillings; swore that Bill was the child, and then held out her hand for the money.

"Not so fast," said Dick. "All that I knew before. This boy told me."

"You little devil!" cried Mrs. Kneebone, viciously, to Thoozy, who nodded his head and laughed.

"I want more. I want to know about the boy's father. What was his name? and when was he married to Polly Tresler?"

"You want to know too much. Now, tell me, do you want to do Polly a bad turn?"

"I don't want to do her a good one, certainly. But I want to do a good turn to a friend of my own. And to get at the way of doing it, I want all the information I can lay my hands on."

"She's a bad lot, Polly is. I've knowed her for sixteen years and more. Ah me, I wasn't always in this poor place! But there—many's the good thing I've done for Polly. I introduced her to her first, down Poplar way—when I had as tidy a little tobacco shop as ever was. Ah! dear me."

"Her first?" Dick looked sharply at her. "Who was her first?"

"Oh, he was a mate—married at Lime'us Church. But they didn't get on. Polly used to beat him; and she got ashamed of a husband who couldn't beat her like the other men. A good quiet sort of body, too, and a first officer. Bowker his name was. So when he went away to sea, she went away from Poplar, too."

"There's two sovereigns for you. And now go on."

The woman looked thirstily at the rest of the money, and presently went on again.

"Now, I don't know very well. She took up

with a young fellow down in the country—I'm not quite certain whether he married her or not—I only heard her story afterward. Then he ran away from her. She came up to London, and got married again."

"What, a third time?"

"Well, what was she to do? She'd run away from her first, and her second had run away from her, and so she took up with another. Well, he died. He was a sailor, too. Polly always liked sailors. Only this one used to whack her when he come home drunk, and I think Polly often enough regretted her first."

"About the first. Do you know if he is alive, and where to find him?"

"I do, sir," said Mrs. Kneebone, "and Polly doesn't. At least, I know where to look for him; and he was alive when I was at Poplar last, because I heard about him from some old pals of his."

"What did you say his name is?"

"Don't you think I've earned the five pounds, sir?"

Dick pushed them across the table.

"Thank you kindly, sir. His name, sir, is Bowker: Cap'en Bowker—good gentleman. And I'll

tell you where you can find all about him; and I'm sure you'll consider it a extra."

"Look here," said Dick, flushing—nothing in all his life ever gave him so much joy as the story of his wife's progress through life—"if all you say is true, this will be the best day's work you ever did. Now, I'm going to pay you what Polly owes for the boy—five and thirty shillings. Here you are. Next, I'm going to take away little Bill."

She threw up her arms in an ecstacy of grief and lamentation.

"Take away my Bill? Take away my little boy Bill, that I raised with my own hands? Oh! sir, I couldn't let him go—I couldn't really; not under five pound, sir."

"She never giv' me nothin', and she's allus whackin' me when Thoozy isn't by," said the object of the more than maternal solicitude.

Thoozy interrupted her, authoritatively bringing his crutch handle on the floor.

"You're a-goin' to let him go for nothink at all," he remarked, quietly—"so there aint no more to be said. Hold *your* jaw. Bill, old chap, the big swell's a-goin' to take you away. He looks as if he was the sort to give you clothes, and make you respectable. Don't cry, because it's all for your

own benefit ; and he seems a good un, though he *is* so precious big."

"Come, Bill," said Dick, "will you come with me? Say good-bye to your friends, and come along. Old woman, you've had your money. Here, Thoozy, is your share."

"Don't cry, Bill," said Thoozy again, beginning to cry himself—"as it's all for the best. And what's for the best, you know, is got to be done, if it's physickin' the babbies, or a washin' of 'em."

Amid the tears of Thoozy and the lamentations of Mrs. Kneebone, Dick bore off his prize. Arrived at the foot of the stairs, they heard a curious noise above, as of heavy blows and wrestling.

"What are they doing, Bill?"

Here came thuds and groans.

"They're a givin' of it to one another. She wants to grab all the tin. Listen. Hooray! Thoozy's got his crutch. She was always a whackin' me awful, till he got the stick. Now she's a catchin' it. Oh! aint Thoozy a good un, just!"

CHAPTER THE FIFTH.

THEY went away, Dick holding the boy by the hand. He did not in the least know what to do with the child. He had taken him away by an impulse, thinking of the great fun it would be to carry Polly's own child down to Market Basing, and present him to his mother. But for the present, he found himself in a comparatively respectable part of London, with a ragged little unwashed gamin on his hands, not knowing what to do next. It was altogether an embarrassing position.

"As for the boy," he thought, looking down at the little mite holding his hand, "I suppose he must be washed and dressed. But who's to do it? And as for Polly—upon my word, Polly, there's a

heavy reckoning against you. I suppose I must go and find a lawyer. Bill, my boy, you're dirty, you know, and ragged—where shall we go to get you washed?"

"Dunno. Never was washed."

"Well, then, where can we go to get you some new clothes?"

"Dunno. Never had no new clothes. I say, you go to the pawnbroker's—that's the place," said Bill, speaking from his own experience, and brightening up a little.

Dick stopped a policeman, who stared at the child with hungry eyes, apparently disappointed at finding that he was not to "run him in."

Bill howled dismally at the sight of the embodiment of civil power.

"I aint done nothink," he cried, trying to escape.

"Comes of a bad lot, sir, I'm afraid; but he's never been in trouble yet."

"I want to get the boy washed and dressed. In fact," Dick explained, "I am going to take him away, and bring him up respectably."

The policeman's face brightened.

"Are you now, sir? I'm very glad to hear that —very glad indeed. They'll do what you want for you at a public-house I know, not far off. I'm

just off my beat, and will go with you. So you're going to take him off the streets, are you? Well, now, that's good of you—that's real goodness and charity. The boy's got no belongings: living at an old woman's—ah, you know. If you can afford to spend the money—it is not much to rich people—take more than one. They're growing up here by hundreds. Take as many as you can afford, and put 'em to school. It'll cost money, because school aint everything. Don't give to missionary societies and rubbish. They do tell me that three-quarters of a million a-year is sent out to convert the blacks. Do you know, sir, how many boys and girls that would provide for? Fifty thousand, sir. Think of that. My son, who's a scholar, totted it up for me. Fifty thousand! If the rich people round London only knew what was inside it, they'd be frightened. I tell you what, sir, if things is going on like this, they'll have something to be frightened about, for the roughs are getting most too strong for us. There'll be an ugly rush some day, you'll see. But people won't do anything without societies. Well, sir, if you've got money, you get up a society for rich people taking children and bringing them up respectable—to be sailors and soldiers, and even—ah! and why

not?—even the police force, if they've got the brains."

"I will," said Dick, "if ever I do start a society—which isn't likely."

"None of your institutions, and refuges, and penitentiaries, and reformatories, and foolishness, sir. You go in for a society where the people are going to look after the children themselves, and not send them out into the world with a ticket all the rest of their lives. Who's going to get over being a reformatory boy? I hav'n't got patience with it. What I says to rich people is—don't talk about doing good, and don't belong to societies, but come down here. I'll talk to 'em; and pick out a boy and a girl, or half-a-dozen boys and girls, and have 'em taught, and washed, and kept respectable, and it'll be the best ticket to get into Heaven that they'll find anywhere. Here's the place, sir. I'll go in with you."

The policeman led the way, and explained what was wanted.

The boy was undressed, still crying, and put into a warm bath, Dick looking on—he was so horribly thin that every rib stuck out like a skeleton's—and for the first time in his life, thoroughly scrubbed and washed. Then, the policeman having brought

an intelligent man from a second-hand shop with a small bundle of all sorts, he was speedily dressed in a garb which astonished and delighted him beyond measure. For it was the garb of a "swell." He put his hands into his pockets, and left off crying. "Whacking" was not imminent, at any rate.

"Now," said Dick, "let us have a good look at him."

He put the boy on the table, and pulled his face back.

His eyes were blue, his nose was snub, his mouth thin and delicate, his chin sharp-pointed and clear, his hair so light as to be almost flaxen.

"Hum!" said Dick, "they can't say you are like me, anyhow. My hair's black, my nose is straight, my mouth is full, my chin is broad and square, like all the Mortiboys. And you're not too much like your mother either, except about the eyes."

Polly's eyes were a dark blue—an unusual colour, which this boy's had. For the rest, a mere shrimp of a boy—so small, that you would not take him for more than seven; but a pretty, bright-faced child, now the dirt was taken off him, with the sharp expression that a London boy always has.

But somehow the boy, now he was dressed, had the look of a gentleman. There was no coarseness

in his features or his expression; his eyes had a dreamy, far-off look, which is seldom seen in any but homebred boys; his mouth was tremulous and sensitive. It was only when he spoke that his street education showed itself.

Dick paid for his accommodation at the public-house, thanked his friend the policeman, and took his prize away with him.

"How old are you, Bill?"

"Ten next January."

"Did you hear us talking about your mother just now?"

"Yes, but I never seen her."

"Would you like to see her?"

"Not if she's like Mother Kneebone. I'd rather stay with you."

"Suppose, Bill, you were to stay with me, and you were to see a woman called Polly Tresler?"

"That's her name?"

"Yes. And suppose she were to ask you questions, do you think you'd let out anything about Mother Kneebone?"

Bill looked up sharply.

"I'm fly," he said. "I won't let out nothink. Dam if I do."

"I say, young 'un, don't say *dam* again, because

the swells never do that till they're grown up. It isn't wicked then, I suppose."

At his lodgings, Lafleur was waiting for him.

"What have you here, Dick—what new game is on?"

"Only a little game of euchre with a woman. And this is the Right Bower, though he don't look like it. I'm going to win it: the stakes are worth having, I can tell you."

"You always win everything, though he certainly does not look much like a winning card. Give him something to eat."

Dick rang the bell, and consigned the child to his landlady, with injunctions to give him plenty to eat and drink.

When he came home that night, at twelve, he found the boy curled up on the hearth-rug, sound asleep. He carried him into his bed-room, undressed him, and laid him in bed. Bill opened his eyes for a moment; but not understanding the position of things, thought it was a queer dream, and went sound off to sleep again.

In the morning, Dick found him still asleep. He had curled his lean arms round Dick's neck, and laid his little cheeks in Dick's big beard, thinking he was in bed with Thoozy.

"Poor little cuss!" said Dick.

That morning he went to a lawyer, one whose name he had heard from Mr. Battiscombe at Market Basing. To him he confided the whole story of his marriage and Polly's wicked goings-on.

They had a long consultation, after which Dick strode away with a lightened countenance.

Bill was washed and dressed ready for him when he came back. The landlady was also ready with a representation. The boy was not in the agreement, and the trouble he gave was to be considered. Dick considered it. Then she begged to call Mr. Mortiboy's attention to the language in which he expressed his ideas—

"Which," she said, "is truly awful. If I had my boys home from school, they shouldn't stay in the same house with him, not for gold."

She shook her finger at Bill, who looked at his protector to see whether he was going to be "whacked." But Mr. Mortiboy only laughed.

"We shall cure him presently, I dare say. Bring him his dinner as soon as you can. Hungry, Bill?"

"I'm allus hungry," said the boy.

When his dinner came, which was also Dick's luncheon, Bill made a rush at the dish as soon as the cover was taken off. Chops! He seized

one in his fingers, and ran to a corner of the room, where he fell to tearing it with his teeth, after the manner of a menagerie tiger. The landlady pointed out this conduct to her tenant.

"That's the way he had his supper last night, sir. A regular little savage."

Dick nodded, and laughed. The woman retired. As she shut the door, the urchin, encouraged by the approving smiles of his patron, as he thought, performed a Catherine-wheel all round the room, with the bone of his mutton-chop in his mouth, finishing off with a "Houp-là!" as he had done the day before. Then he went back to his corner, and gnawed the bone.

"Bill, take the bone out of your mouth, and sit down on that chair. Did you never sit down to table in your life?"

"Eh?"

"How did you get your dinner at Mrs. Kneebone's?"

"Never had no dinner. Morning, Mother made tea for herself, and sometimes I got some if Thoozy was able to get up. When Thoozy had rheumatics dreadful bad, so that he couldn't get up, I only got a bit of bread. Went out all day on the cadge. If I got nothink, old Mother Kneebone giv' me a

whackin' and another bit of bread. When Thoozy was all right, I got on first-rate. Thoozy used to help hisself and me too."

"Well, now you've got to learn manners."

Bill then received his first lesson in the usages of polite society—in teaching him which, as it was a novel occupation, Dick found the afternoon slip away pleasantly enough.

"Nobody ever taught you anything, I suppose?"

"Only Thoozy. He used to read to me. He's awful clever—knows everything. He promised to learn me to read as soon as he could find time. Once I was took up by a lady and put to school. It was a Sunday, because the bells were ringing, and the swells going to church. There was a bun and a cup of tea—jolly!—and then they taught us. I went lots of times on Sundays. They told me to say prayers and to sing hymns. I sang one at home they taught me, but old Mother Kneebone took a stick, and said she'd break every bone in my body if I didn't give over."

"They never taught you your duty, I suppose," said the moral Dick.

"What's that? There was a man in a straight black gownd said we was all going—Thoozy and me, and all the lot—to hell."

"That's good news to tell a child," said Dick.

"So I told Thoozy; and I asks him where it is, and what it's like when you've got there. He ups and says, 'If it aint better than Paragon-place, it won't be very jolly for us, Bill. Let's hope there'll be plenty to eat, and no Mother Kneebone.' Then I thought I should like to go there. But Thoozy said school wasn't no good."

Presently, the boy, unaccustomed to a chop and half a glass of beer, fell into a profound slumber; and Dick smoked on, thinking what he was to do with him.

He stayed one week in town, having interviews with the lawyers, and making out his case against Polly. This was not, with the data they had to go upon, at all a difficult task. After a few days, the story ran much as Mrs. Kneebone had told him.

Polly, at the age of eighteen, had gone up to London into service. She made certain female friends who had belongings at Poplar, where she went on her "Sundays out." There she fell in with the mate of a sailing ship, a man twenty-five years older than herself, who was attracted by her rosy cheeks and bright eyes, and married her. According to Mrs. Kneebone—who ought to know some-

thing of feminine nature—the main cause of the conjugal unhappiness which ensued was that Polly despised a man who allowed his wife to beat him. No doubt there was a certain amount of truth in Mrs. Kneebone's remark: far be it from me to suggest suspicion as to any statement made by a woman in most respects so admirable. But this was not all the truth. When Captain Bowker went away, he left, in lieu of a monthly allowance from the shippers, which most merchant skippers' wives draw, a sum of money equivalent to it, calculated to last during the period of his absence. It must be observed that Polly was, if I may coin the term, a pseudo-maniac: she lied habitually, and even causelessly. Had she been of a higher rank in life, she would have become, of course, a novelist, drawing from her imagination some of that superfluous energy which prompted her now to invent, whenever invention appeared not only profitable, but even amusing. She had, in obedience to this proclivity, lied about herself and her belongings to her husband. Bowker had been told by her that she came from Cumberland. Why from Cumberland? I don't know. Polly only knew that it was a long way off, so she said Cumberland; and as her husband had never been there, it answered as well as any other place.

When Captain Bowker had been away for about a year—that is, for more than half of his appointed time—Polly bethought herself that she ought to go to Market Basing and pay a visit to her parents. She went; found her father dead, and her mother on the point of going to the workhouse; stayed there—promising at first for a few weeks only. But weeks passed into months; and when her husband returned—bringing a parcel of Chinese silks for his wife, and a parrot that knew how to cough and swear, having learned these accomplishments from a consumptive mariner—he found his house there, and "all standing," as he expressed it, but no Polly. Nor could he light upon any traces of his Polly. First, because he was a warm-hearted man, he shed tears, and wrung the neck of the parrot for swearing at him. Next he thanked the Lord for being rid of a bad lot, sold the sticks, paid the rent, and went to sea again.

Then something happened to Polly. She met Dick Mortiboy: fell in with him in the fields as he was walking home from Parkside to Derngate; met him again—met him every night; saw that the boy was madly in love with her; encouraged him, but gave herself all the airs of a vertu farouche; received his presents; and then * * * *

Bigamy. It is an ugly word. Polly said it over and over to herself very often about this time. It means all sorts of unpleasantness: it conveys ideas of courts, policemen, prison, an unbecoming uniform, a diet rather plain than luxurious, compulsory early rising, a limited circle of friends, very few books to read. A very ugly word. But bigamy without the danger? To marry twice and not to be found out? To marry the son of the richest man in the town, so that the sailor husband should never know? This seemed a prize worth risking something for. And what did she risk? Nothing. She asked her mother. Nothing, repeated the old lady. How could Bowker find out? He was bound to go to sea: he was always afloat: he was twenty years older than herself: he might get drowned — most likely he would get drowned — perhaps he was drowned already. And then she would have her new husband clear to herself.

And the son of the richest man in the town!

Young Dick pressed her. In his imagination, the fresh-cheeked, rosy village girl, who said she was eighteen when she was five-and-twenty, was an angel. Dick was a fool, of course; but many men have been fools at nineteen. He pressed her to promise to marry him. She promised. That

meant nothing, because she could always break off. But his father sent him up to town to work for a time in a London bank, and—and—alas! for Polly's vow—it succumbed; and one fine morning she walked up the aisle of St. Pancras' Church, and was married to Dick Mortiboy.

"Bigamy," said Dick, chuckling — "bigamy! That's a very pretty rod to hold over my Polly's head. And the worthy sailor still alive."

When Dick disappeared there were two courses open to his afflicted wife. She might go to Mr. Mortiboy, and proclaim herself his daughter-in-law; or she might go back to her Bowker. She reasoned out the matter with her mother; and, by her advice, elected to return to her first husband. The two reasons which the experienced matron, her mamma, urged were — first, that if Bowker found her out, it would lead to criminal proceedings and great unpleasantness; secondly, that if she told Mr. Mortiboy, he would infallibly, so angry would he be, refuse to afford her any assistance whatever. So she went to Poplar. Captain Bowker, her old friends told her, was gone to the China Seas in the country trade: would not be

back for five years. Further, he had left a message that, if Polly came back, she was to be told that he was quit of her, and that she was henceforth no wife of his. That formula constitutes a nautical divorce. So Polly had to abandon hopes in that direction. Of course, she might, had she known, have gone to the shippers in whose employ her husband was, and demanded an allowance as his wife. She did not know their names. Then she fell in love for the first time. It was also with a sailor, one William Flint, ship's carpenter by profession, who so far overcame her scruples of conscience as to lead her to the altar a third time. Mr. Flint was the father of little Bill. He died before the birth of his son, after a short period of matrimonial happiness, during which he effectually taught Polly the beauty of submission by means of a thick stick. Mrs. Flint, thus bereft of two husbands and widowed of a third, left her child in care of Mrs. Kneebone, and lived in London for some years, still single, though not without admirers. When, like Horace's Lydia, she ceased to hear them knock at her door, she retired to Market Basing, where the rest of her history is known.

"The whole case," said the lawyer, after expos-

ing the principal facts, "is as simple as possible. Bowker still lives, and has a pension from his employers. We can put our hands upon him whenever you please. The woman committed bigamy in marrying you. You may proceed against her if you like. Bowker may get a divorce if he pleases. The boy is no more yours than he is mine."

"Thank you," said Dick. "I'll wait a week or so, and think things over. I suppose I couldn't marry again without making any fuss about it?"

"You might, certainly; but you had better not just yet. Put yourself wholly in our hands, my dear sir."

Dick went away thoughtful. He was not altogether satisfied. Polly was a bad lot—a very bad lot. At the same time, it seemed mean to put her into prison, and bring her to utter shame and misery. He was always tender to criminals—not from any self-compunctions or prickings of conscience, but chiefly from the mental attitude of resistance to law into which his roving years had put him. Could not a compromise be effected? Suppose she were to go away, and be silent about it all? Suppose—but, in short, he would wait a little.

Then he thought of Grace. Free, free at last! The follies of his youth trampled down and forgotten! Love before him, and a peaceful life, such as he yearned after, away in some garden of pleasant England, hand in hand with Grace! Polly's chance was slender.

He went home to little Bill. It took some days to teach the child that mankind at large, though strangers, were not his mortal enemies. He learned the smaller lessons—those of propriety and the habits of civilization—easily enough, because he had nothing to unlearn, never having had any manners at all. He was a gentle child, too—submissive and docile. His worst difficulty, of course, was his language, which he readily perceived was not the same as that employed by his patron. He used to listen to what people said, and then go away and imitate them in a corner—gestures, and voice, and all. A perfectly wild boy: as untaught—save for the few lessons which he had got from Thoozy—as regards the outer world, as if he had been born in a desert and reared on the top of a mountain. A boy whose mind was like wax to receive impressions—a blank waxen tablet, for the stylus of Dick to work upon. Bad things he knew, after a fashion; but as they had never been called bad to him, of

course it did not matter. As Euripides has explained, we only know what is bad by the canon of what is good. Good and bad were alike to little Bill.

In a day or two, the little animal was as fond of his patron and as entirely trustful in him as if he had been a dog. He ran about after him; he curled up at his feet if he sat down; he climbed upon his knees: he sat up solemnly, and stared at him; he listened to all he said, and repeated it to himself. And Dick gave him, in that week which was spent in completing the "case" against Polly, a whole volume of moral philosophy, and a complete sheaf of moral axioms.

Mindful of the untrustworthy character of the Church Catechism, from the evidence he had received of it—he had not read it since he was a boy—he composed a short one for himself, which he asked the boy daily.

"What is a boy's first duty, Bill?"

"Never steal, never tell lies, never swear, hold his jaw, do his work, go away from England, and get on."

He numbered his commandments off on his fingers, and went through them glibly enough.

"Right, boy. When I was your age, they used

to teach me the Ten Commandments; but somehow they didn't seem to stick. I didn't want to worship graven images, so it was no good telling me not. Boys do prig, Bill, and don't get found out. They go on prigging, and then they do get found out. Then you know what happens.

"The thing to do is to persuade people to trust you. Show that you are able to get on, and you will. Whatever you do, Bill, put your back into it. I know a poor creature in the States who was always having chances, and always failing, because he never had the pluck to take them. He had the fever last time I saw him, in a poor, mean sort of way. Hadn't the pluck to shake like other people.

"Here's another commandment for you, Bill. *Always be ready to fight.* It's the fighting men get the best of it. If a boy insults you, up with your fist. People are mostly cowards. If you make them afraid, they'll do anything. Remember that, Bill.

"Never you trust people that go round cracking you up to your face. If I wanted to get something out of you, I should say, 'Bill, you're a pretty boy, and a nice behaved boy.' As I want to do you

good, I say, 'Bill, you're a thin, mealy-faced little devil, without enough strength to squeeze the life out of a mosquito.' You'll be no good till you're fat and strong, and know how to talk, and to behave, and to read. You remember that, Bill.

"You'll have to go to school soon, my boy. I'm not going to have you taught a lot of rubbish, on pretence of improving your intellect, because the masters don't know anything else. You'll learn to talk French and German; you'll learn music; you'll learn to ride, and to fence, and to box; and you'll learn all the science you can get stuffed into you. But no Latin, my boy, and no rubbish.

"Keep your eyes wide open, Bill, for shams and humbugs. Everybody in England, almost, is a humbug. You'll have to make money, and you can't do it, if you stay here, without pretending and telling lies. When you get big, old chap, you and I will go away to the West, and make a clearing, and grow our own crops. That's real, at any rate. Remember that, Bill.

"Don't be in a hurry to fall in love. Wait till you are five-and-twenty before you think about a girl at all. Then get married as soon as you can. When we get to Market Basing, I'll show you the

kind of girl you may fall in love with. You remember that.

"Never be satisfied *till you've got all you want.* Rich people teach the poor to be humble and contented. That's because they want to keep what they've got. If you see a man humble, *kick him till he's proud.* And if you see a man contented, have him locked up in a lunatic asylum.

"I remember once, out there, we caught a man in the act of horse-stealing. Some were for hanging him. 'Don't do that,' I said. 'Lets tar and feather him.' So we did; and when the job was finished—he really looked beautiful—we made him dance a breakdown. The poor devil was frightened, and looked as miserable as if the rope was round his neck. So one of the crowd shouts out to him, 'Dance jolly,' he says—'dance jolly; or, by the powers, we'll hang you.' That man instantly looked as jolly as if it was all fun and jokes—face wreathed with smiles, as the books say. I never saw a better breakdown. So, if you see a man humble, you kick him till he's proud. Remember that, Bill.

"One man's as good as another, Bill. Don't you be afraid of a man because he's got a carriage, and a different coat to yours. He's only better than you if he's stronger, and has got better brains.

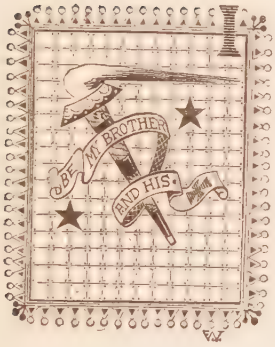
"Never you take a thing on trust. A man on board the boat from America wanted to persuade me about his religious notions. Said they were Bishop somebody's. That's all he had to believe them by. Bill, it's a mighty poor way of knowing things, if you believe all they tell you. Some day I'll tell you what a priest in Mexico wanted me to believe.

"Manners, my boy. Get manners as soon as you can. They help a man more than anything else. Always be polite to everybody; but if you want anything, let them know it at starting. It saves a great deal of fighting. As I told you, if you have manners to start with, and pluck to back your demands, you'll get on."

The sermons, of which these are only notes, were not all delivered in a single day, or in a single week. They are inserted here to indicate the nature of the course of philosophy which Dick was putting his young pupil through. From time to time he examined him; added to the commandments which formed his catechism; illustrated his position by anecdotes; made a sort of running commentary on his teaching, or gave the boy an exercise on some knotty point.

All this excellent moral teaching we are fain to pass over, because space and time are limited. Anybody who wants to know more of Dick's teaching may purchase his aphorisms of me, on moderate terms, to be mutually agreed upon.

CHAPTER THE SIXTH.



IT was in a very changed mood that Dick went back to Market Basing; one that boded little good to Polly. He went back rejoicing in his freedom. He could try once more for his cousin, Grace Heathcote. If she accepted he would —what would he do?— write to his lawyers to get his marriage with Polly Tresler annulled in the quickest manner, and at any cost.

With him, of course, went little Bill. Dick had got him dressed in a fantastic garb of his own invention, consisting chiefly of brown velvet and gold lace, in which the child looked wonderfully beautiful.

I said before that he had the look of a gentleman. It was more than this : he had that look of refinement and intelligence which might have been produced in a boy of extraordinary talent by a course of the most careful training, the highest kind of education. He was now almost presentable : he had ascertained most of the words which are *tapu* : he was convinced that his original theories as to the nature of women, based on his experience of Mrs. Kneebone, were erroneous, or at least not capable of general application : he did not take to his heels when he saw a policeman : he ate and drank like a Christian. The only thing which made him sometimes troublesome was that he really did not know how, without using *tapu* words, to express his ideas. And he sometimes, by imitating exactly what he saw others do, provoked the observer's smile, or stimulated his curiosity.

Dick denied himself his cigar in the train, thinking that the smell of a smoking-carriage might be bad for the boy. Consequently, there were ladies in the carriage : two young ladies who whispered to each other, and shot telegraphic signals about nothing out of the corners of their eyes ; and an old one. The old lady fell to admiring the boy. She looked at him for a long time, and could not resist the impulse to talk to him.

"Your son, may I ask, sir?" she said to Dick.

"My ward, madam."

"Come to me, my dear. I've got a grandson something like him." She drew the child to her knee. Little Bill looked wistfully at Dick. "What is your name, my dear?"

"Bill."

"Y—e—s—William—a pretty name."

"'Taint William. It's Bill."

"Dear me!" thought the old lady—"this is a very vulgar child. Now talk to me, my dear," she said aloud.

This was a staggerer for little Bill. He was not anxious now to answer questions, being quite aware that his previous history, though not discreditable perhaps, had yet been unfortunate. He was silent for a little, and then, unfortunately recollecting exactly what he had seen his patron's landlady in London do one afternoon when she brought up the bill, he slipped off the old lady's knee, and, striking an attitude, half deprecating, half assertive, he coughed behind his hand, and murmured—

"It was not always thus with me. I have had happier days."

Then he placed his hand on his heart, and sighed deeply. Then he looked at Dick, to see if he had done anything wrong.

In a word the boy was a little monkey—just as imitative—just as quick and clever.

"God bless my soul! cried the old lady; what an extraordinary child!"

The two young ladies screamed. Dick laughed. And the boy, seeing their amusement, jumped up and down, laughing too.

"Pardon him, madam," said Dick. "By an unlucky series of accidents, my ward's education has been totally neglected. Sit here, my boy, and do not let us talk any more."

No one was in the villa to receive them. Dick took the boy by the hand, and led him into the house. All the magnificence bewildered him.

"Do you live here, Uncle Dick?"

"This is my house, Bill; and here you and I will live together as jolly as we can. Come upstairs. Now this, my boy, is to be your room. There isn't a bed in it at present, but I will get you one. It is your own room. We shall have you taught to read and write; and then you shall have books, if you take to books—as I expect you will. And now—I wish you could ride—we will have a little drive into the country together."

The groom brought round Dick's dog-cart, and they drove off.

First, to the bank. Bill trotted in after his protector, following him like a little dog.

"Who is this?" asked Ghrimes.

"This is little Bill— William Flint, by name adopted ward of Mr. Dick Mortiboy. Don't look suspicious, Ghrimes."

"Indeed, I was not thinking anything of the sort."

Dick transacted his buisness, which did not take long, and went out. He took the road to Hounslope. People looked at the cart with astonishment. What new thing had happened? Young Mr. Mortiboy with a child beside him! Polly, standing at the door of her mother's cottage, saw him drive past. Saw the boy, too, and wondered. During this interval she had been full of fear, and uncertainty, and rage. It was not fear of "the other" turning up: it was bodily fear of being killed if she offended her husband. She resolved to go at least to the villa that very evening, and have it out. Not a thought of little Bill!

"Oh, what a pretty boy!" cried Grace. "Lucy come and look. Who is he, Dick?"

"He's my ward, now. A week ago he was anybody's ward, running about the streets. I've had

him cleaned and new rigged, you see, and I don't think he looks amiss. Shake hands as I taught you, Bill. Grace, come and talk to me for five minutes in the garden. Lucy, take care of the boy, will you? Give him a lesson in good behaviour."

Grace saw that he had something of importance to say, and led the way to the garden without another word. It was one of those old-fashioned gardens, where you are sure of finding all the old flowers side by side with the best of the new—mignonette, wall-flower, sweet-William, Venus's looking-glass, polyanthus, London pride, and the rest. At the end lay a sort of little shrubbery, behind which again was an arbour.

"Come into the arbour, Grace," said Dick.

He was looking wonderfully serious and thoughtful—his firm lips twitching with some anxieties, his eyes cast down.

He motioned to Grace to go in and sit down but she remained standing outside.

They were behind the shrubbery, and hidden from the house.

"You remember the scene at the cross, Grace?"

"I have spoken to no one about it."

"I knew you would not. You found out then two secrets of my life, both of which I wanted to

hide from you;—one, that I love you; the other that I am married already. Since that night Grace, I have made a discovery."

"What is it, Dick?"

"That I can free myself, Grace—that I am free already. I can be divorced. The marriage was not a real one. I am certain of that. The obstacle exists no longer—or will exist no longer in a very short time. All that my money can do to further the separation of that woman from me shall be done. I have told the lawyers to spare no trouble to hunt up every atom and scrap of her life—to ferret out every secret she ever had. I shall hold myself up to ridicule in the papers, perhaps. What does that matter? Who cares for a day's notoriety? Free I *will* be—free I *must* be."

"I should like to congratulate you, Dick; but it seems all so dreadful. Are you quite sure? Oh, Dick, don't be cruel to—to an innocent woman."

"Am I sure? Grace, I could send her into court at once, to-day, with my evidence in my hands. But I will not: I will wait for more. How bad that woman is, you could never know, you could never even suspect. Bad wife of a bad husband. We were fitly mated then—we are not fitly mated now. And she must go." His face was stern and

hard. Suddenly it lit up again, and he burst into one of those quaint, soft laughs of his which made every one else laugh too. His laugh was as infectious as another person's yawn. "I forgot to tell you, Grace. Such fun! After you went away, I met her again by the river. She had been drinking more, and said something or other which made me in a rage, I believe. At all events, I took her by the arms, and chucked her in."

"Dick!—you might have drowned her."

"Yes. I didn't think of that till she was at the bottom, and I saw the bubbles coming up—her bubbles! But there was no fear. Bless you, she came to the top, and floated like a cork. You should have seen her face when she came out!"

Dick told the story quite simply, as if it was the most natural thing in the world that he should throw his wife into the river. Grace looked at him with astonishment, and then began to laugh as well. It was impossible to treat Dick like an ordinary creature.

"Now look here, Grace, my dear," Dick went on. "I offended you at the cross, and behaved like a—like a—mean Mexican, with my love, and my fury, and all the rest of it. I'm very sorry and ashamed. Tell me again I am forgiven."

"Of course you are forgiven, Dick."

"Yes, I was mad then because of Polly. But she's as good as gone now, and I am mad no more. And——the truth remains, Grace, that I love you —more than all the world together. It is all exactly as I told you a fortnight ago."

"But you mustn't love me, Dick. I belong to somebody else."

"Must not love you, my dear? Why, Grace, you might as well tell me I must not eat and drink. Not love you when I see you, and talk to you, and take your hand in mine—this little hand—" he took it as he spoke, and held it in his, Grace only looking him straight in the face: "this little hand. Why, Grace, do you think I am made of stone?"

"Indeed, I am sure you are not, Dick. But do you think I am a woman to give her word one day, and recall it the next? Is that fair, Dick?"

"It would be if you loved me. I should not care unless you were to take away your word from me, Grace. All is fair in love."

"No, but I do not love you, Dick—I never can love you. Listen, and I will tell you all my secrets. I talk to you because you love me, as I can talk to no one else. And because I trust you, Dick, I tell you what I can hardly tell my own sister. Indeed

she would not understand me." She laid her hand in his—it rested on the back of the garden seat. "Dick, do you remember what you told me—how you tremble when I touch you? It is all exactly the same with me. When I hear Frank's step—I never do now; but I say now, because I dream of it still—I tremble all over. When he comes near me, I feel all the blood rushing to my face. If he touches me, my pulses beat. If I see his handwriting, my hand shakes. If I awake at night, thinking of him, I do not want to sleep any more, and lie patiently, praying to God for him. When I pass their dear old house, I cannot keep my tears down. When I have nothing to do, I go to the lane—see there: you are tall, and can look over the hedge: it is the lane beyond the next field—where he first told me he loved me, and sit down, and think it all over again. Oh! Dick, such a cold day it was!—and yet we were so warm: such a snowy, frosty, windy day in January, and yet I was so glad and happy! I never knew that I loved him until he told me that he loved me, and then I knew—oh! in a moment I knew that there could be no other man in all the world for me but Frank. Dear Dick, I love you too, but not in this way. See—I can give you my hand without trembling. I

can see you coming without my pulses beating faster. I read you all my heart: more, more than I could ever, I think, tell to Frank. I tell you to make you leave off loving me."

Dick shook his head. He was sitting down now, on the garden seat, holding her hand in his. He stooped and kissed it.

"Dick—dear Dick!—don't be cruel to me. Mamma is unkind because she wants you to marry me, and says that I don't encourage you."

Dick laughed ruefully.

"I don't want any encouragement, Grace."

"Everything seems somehow dark and gloomy. Don't be cruel, Dick. Be my dear old Dick, like you were years ago, before you went away, when I was a little thing, and you a big boy. I can never love you, Dick. Let me say it again and again, and over and over, so that you may believe me at last. Then, if I were to marry you, how would it be with you? How should you like your wife to be brooding over her ruined lover, and trying to do a cold-hearted duty by her husband? Dick, it would be wicked. It would kill me—it would drive you mad. Don't ask me—don't ask me, my cousin, for I love my Frank."

She stopped now because she could not go on

any longer, and her voice broke down. Dick's head was bent above her hand, and he said nothing. Presently a tear—only one—of the largest size consistent with the laws which guide the formation of drops, fell upon her hand. Grace had made her lover weep. Since his mother died, he had shed no tear. They stood so for some minutes.

Five minutes before this, Mrs. Heathcote, returning home, found Lucy with the boy.

"It is Dick's new protégé," she explained. "Grace and he are in the garden."

"Protégé!—stuff and nonsense!" said Mrs. Heathcote. "What does Dick want with children?"

She went to the back of the house, and looked out into the garden. No Grace there. Then she stepped softly across the lawn, and heard voices behind the shrubbery. She stopped and listened. She heard the words—"Don't ask me, my cousin. I love my Frank;" and, turning pale, hurried back to the house. She could not speak.

Presently, Dick lifted his head with a smile. Grace knew then that she had won the battle.

"I give you up, Grace, dear. All the same, I

love you still. But I will never again speak—of love to you. That, at least, I promise."

"You must promise me more, Cousin Dick."

"What more? I will promise you anything you like to ask, child Grace.

"Help, Frank."

"Yes, my sister," answered Dick, humbly.

"Am I your sister? Then Frank is your brother. Dick, you must help your brother."

"Let me kiss you once, my dear. Let me have one kiss."

He took her head in his hands, and kissed her—solemnly, not passionately—on forehead and cheek. She disengaged herself, blushing and confused, with the tears in her eyes. What was she that this man—so good, so kind—should love her so?

"There was a solemn oath in every kiss, Grace. You may trust me, for Frank and yourself, to the death. You are both mine. Tell me only what I am to do first."

"I will find his address from Kate, Dick, and then—oh, then we shall know what to do."

"I know what to do already," cried Dick, his face brightening up like a corn field after a cloud has passed over it. "I know already what you would all like. We will make him a partner in the

bank—Ghrimes and Frank together—and revive the old name. It shall be Melliship, Mortiboy, & Co.—just as before. Eh, Grace? What a rage the old man would be in if he only knew it! Ho! ho!"

He laughed—with his jolly, mellow voice—as lightly as a boy, and with no sign of the emotion which had just possessed him; and left her. Mrs. Heathcote was gone to her own room. Lucy was sitting with the boy, who stared at her with great eyes, as at a vision of another world. Taking him away, he drove back to Market Basing.

Mrs. Heathcote, too angry at first to speak, went back to the house, and tried to think. Should she tell her husband? Should she remonstrate with Grace? What good would it do? They were both too obstinate to receive remonstrance with favour. She would only make things worse. Should she speak to Lucy? What use? So she had to keep it to herself, consoling herself with the thought that, after all, it was early days; —perhaps Dick might propose again; perhaps Grace might not be always obdurate; perhaps Frank Melliship would "do something." Nevertheless, it was a cruel blow to overhear the rejection of half a million of money.

In the evening of the same day, Polly, not without a good deal of misgiving, and consultation with her mother, went up to the villa, in order to have it out with her husband. She resolved for herself to assume an aggressive attitude, and meditated a line of action which she considered would prove most effective with Dick. First, she put on all her best things; then she stuck a pistol—it was only an old single-barrelled thing which she had by her—in her pocket; and under her shawl she carried the family carving-knife. Then she walked boldly over the bridge which arched the river half a mile above the villa, stepped across the fields, and knocked at Dick's door.

The proprietor of the house opened it.

"I thought you would turn up to-night. Pray come in, Polly. We will talk inside."

He spoke with so much politeness that Polly smelt mischief. But she followed without saying a word. He led the way to the smoking-room, where sat little Bill in his gorgeous attire.

"Who's that boy?" asked Polly.

"We'll come to him directly," said Dick. "Now, Polly, the game's played out, and you'd better throw up the cards."

"What do you mean, Dick? If you think I'm

going to be murdered quietly, you're just mistaken ; so see here !"

She took out her pistol and carving-knife, and, standing with the table between them, brandished the weapons in his face with the air of a heroine at the Adelphi.

"Pretty toys—very pretty toys," said her husband. "No, Polly, I'm not going to murder you. As an old friend, I should perhaps advise you to make tracks. But, after all, you needn't do that, because you are quite certain to be followed."

She stared at him, wondering, with a sinking heart, what was to follow.

"Carry your memory back twelve years and three-quarters. Is it done ?"

"It is. What little lark are you up to now, Dick ?"

"What do you see ?"

"I see you and me walking up the aisle of St. Pancras' Church."

"St. Pancras' Church. Very good indeed. Now carry your memory two years and three-quarters or so farther on. Where are we on a certain Monday about that time ?"

She assumed a sulky and stubborn air. But she turned pale, notwithstanding.

"I don't know. How am I to remember so long ago?"

"You need not remember unless you like, you know. Well, let us have another question, and I have done. Carry your memory back to Limehouse Church, two years before the St. Pancras business."

This time she reeled as if she had been struck. For a space she did not answer.

Then she murmured, with dry lips—

"Prove it—prove it. You can't do it."

"Polly, the game's up. It's all come out. I'm trying now to find out the best way of getting rid of my marriage without, if you fall in with my views, bringing you before a court of law. Because, you see, Polly, you've committed a very pretty bigamy. Bowker was alive when you married me, and you knew it. I can prove it. He's alive now!"

Polly let the pistol and carving knife drop, and fell down on her knees, moaning and crying.

"Oh! Dick—Dick. I married you because I loved you. I did, indeed—I did, indeed! And I married the other man because I thought you were dead. Believe me, Dick—oh! believe me, and forgive me!"

She was serious in her grief at heart, because Dick represented money and ease to her. Besides, in her way—her coarse, rough way—she really loved the man.

"Forgive you?" said Dick. "I don't quite understand what you mean by forgiving. I'll forgive you fast enough as soon as we're divorced: not a moment before, if you pray on your knees from this till midnight. Get up, Polly, and don't be play-acting. Before your own son, too."

"My son!" She started up as if she had been shot. "My son! Oh! then—now I see who has done the mischief."

"Your son, Polly—Flint's son. Not mine at all, you know. Look at him, and tell me what you think of him."

She seized the boy, who was trembling with terror, and held him under the lamp to look at him.

"Uncle Dick," he cried, "don't let her have me."

"He's my boy—he's my son. I shall take him away."

"No you don't, Polly. That's one of my conditions. Prisoners are not allowed, remember, to have their children in gaol with them. Now, listen to me. For the present, and until I have decided

what to do, you go away from Market Basing. I don't care where you go to. My lawyers will give you a pound a-week to live on : always understand that it is only for the present. You tell no one here anything : if you do, you go to gaol the next day. The boy remains with me. You write out to-morrow morning and give me a full confession, stating that you knew Bowker to be alive when you married me."

"I won't," cried the woman. "And I'll have my boy."

"That is what you will do," said Dick, unmoved. "If you break through any part of these conditions, you know the consequences. The whole story of your life is known to me. Your eight years in London, Polly—what do you think of that? Everything will be published in open court, and you will go off to gaol for a couple of years, or ten years. And where will you be when you come out?"

"I'll kill Mother Kneebone," she hissed.

"That's as you please. Do anything you like with that old lady ; but you will be hanged if you do, you know."

Polly wavered, and loosed her hold of the child,

who instantly slipped behind Dick's legs for protection.

"Here is money to take you to London. Here is the address of the lawyers, to whom you will go for your weekly allowance. I shall write to them to-night. If you do not appear here before to-morrow to make your written confession, I shall write to them to take out the warrant that will send you to prison. Now go."

She took the paper and the money, and went away without a word or a sign.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTH.

POLLY went home to her mother. The dear old lady, in spite of Polly's assertion, had heard the truth about the ducking, and rejoiced, because it gave her daughter, as she thought, an opportunity of threatening reprisals.

Before she left on her errand of frightening Dick, her mother had advised her—

"Don't you be afraid, Polly—he can't kill you. He calls hisself a gentleman, so I suppose he won't beat you. You stick up to him. Tell him you'll blare it out all over the town. Threaten him, my gal. Don't never let out that you're afraid of him. If he won't come down with hush-money to keep it dark, tell him you're agoin' to git a warrant out against him for your own protection. That's the

way, Polly. Give me my drops handy, against you come back."

Presently, her daughter returned, but pale, startled, and faint.

"It's all up, mother," she murmured.

"What's all up, Poll? You aint been such a fool as to let out that you was afraid, have you?"

"It's no use being afraid or not, now. It's all up, mother, I tell you. What you always prophesied has come. He has found out about the other two."

"Polly!—the other two? Both on 'em?"

"Both. Mother Kneebone told him. No one else could. No one else knew—unless he found out for himself. Oh, he's a devil—he's a devil!"

"Who's Mother Kneebone?"

"The woman as had the boy. Dick's got the boy now. Says he means to keep him. I don't want the brat, I'm sure."

"The woman who had the boy," snarled her mother. "The woman who had the secrets that you wouldn't tell your own mother. Serves you right, Polly—serves you right, for not telling me everything. Why did you let Mrs. Kneebone know about yourself at all?"

"She knew all along. It's no use singing out,

mother. It's all up, I tell you. I shall go to London, and you must go to the union."

The old woman fell back moaning on her pillow. As her head touched it, there was a chink of money.

"My money!" cried Polly, brightening up. "My money! Let's see how much there is."

Her mother clutched the bag from under her head, and held it tight: not tight enough, however, in her old hands to save it from her daughter, who snatched it from her grasp after a brief and unequal contest.

It was a stocking, and in the toe lay all, or nearly all, the money she had got from Dick, except what she had spent in dress.

Polly counted it out. There were fifty-five pounds, all in sovereigns. She put back fifty into the stocking, which she carefully placed in her own pocket. Then she pulled out a purse, containing fourpence in coppers and a few shillings, put four of the sovereigns in it, and gave the remaining one back to her mother, who lay back in the bed, moaning and cursing—now loud, now soft—like a gale at sea.

"Oh! that ever I had a daughter," groaned the old woman. "Oh! I wish you'd never been born.

To take and send me to the union. Oh! I'm sorry that ever I saw your face. Oh! I wish I'd drownded you when you was a baby, as I wanted to. To let her old mother go on the parish! I wish you was smothered! I wish you was dead! I wish you was transported! I wish you was hanged! I wish you was blind, and deaf, and dumb, and full of aches and pains! I do!"

She stopped, not for want of ejaculations, for her quiver was full of them, but for want of breath.

Polly, who was comparatively accustomed to these outbreaks, calmly proceeded to undress, with the design of going to bed. When her mother choked, she lifted her up, and patted her on the back to bring her round.

"You've had a good long spell out of the union, considering, mother, so you may as well make up your mind to go in quietly. Why, you must be past seventy now. It'll be good for you to have the chaplain coming round with his nice talk, and the services on Sunday. You've been a wicked old hussy, you know, and it may be the making of you, after all."

"I'm not so bad as you," cried the old woman, mad with rage. "You pepper and salt drab—you

bag of wickedness — you, you — black, brazen, blaring, pitchfire tom-cat."

Polly heeded not. She had let down her hair, and was looking at herself in her glass. Obedient to feminine instincts, the first use she had made of the money which Dick had given her was to buy a looking-glass. She saw a large, coarse face—coarse through drink—with thick lips. Her nose, which had been straight and well formed, was puffy. This was through drink. Her forehead was swollen and red. Drink had left its mark. Her eyes alone remained—deep, large, limpid, dark blue.

"The boy has got my eyes," she murmured with a sigh, thinking of days when she had attractions enough to catch the calf love of young Dick Mortiboy.

Then she went to bed, her mother pursuing her with execrations as she climbed the narrow stairs. They are not written down here, because they were unparliamentary, and unbecoming the gentle character of woman, from whose lips nil nisi lene ought to proceed.

Early in the morning she came down again, shook up the old woman—not unkindly—and began putting her things together.

"Look here, mother—I must go to London, you

know—because else I shall have to go to prison; so it can't be helped. You've got one sovereign already. I'll give you five more—come. That'll carry you on for a bit; and I'll tell Mrs. Smith's Ameliarann to come in and look after you. Let's part friends."

The old woman clutched the money, and Polly went away without those tender wishes and embraces which some parents lavish upon their departing children.

She was dressed in all her finery, to save the trouble of carrying the things, and had the rest of her belongings in a single bag which she carried herself.

She went straight to the villa. Dick was already up, though it was only eight o'clock, and was waiting for her.

"Now then," she said, cheerfully, "if I've got to write things down, I'd better begin. No, I won't write. I never can write decent. You shall write, Dick, and I will sign. Bless you, mother always said you'd find out some day."

Dick got the notes with which the lawyers had furnished him for reference, and sat down meekly, to write at her dictation. Walking up and down, she began her narrative.

In a clear voice, in a free and easily flowing style, which would have done honour to me, the novelist, she recounted the events of her life, from her marriage with Mr. Bowker to her marriage with Mr. Flint. No motives assigned, no psychological doublings, no excuses offered, nor attempt to explain or extenuate. Plain matter-of-fact statement. At the death of the dear departed saint, Mr. Flint, she stopped.

"I'm afraid, Mrs. Bowker," said Dick, "that we have not quite finished. There are still eight years."

"Two years I was at Market Basing, in service."

"That leaves six."

"I shan't tell you what I did in those six years."

"Perhaps you will let me write, and you can sign."

Dick took the notes, and rapidly wrote, in as few words as possible, the story of those six years. Then Polly took the manuscript from his hands, and read it all through without blushing.

"Before I sign it, I want to put in something for myself."

"You are not in a position to make conditions."

"Then I want to ask a question. What are you going to do with this?"

"For the present, I am going to lock it up in my own safe."

"And not going to show it to any one? Oh! then it's all right. Hand me the pen, Dick. You're not the boy, my handsome Dick, to send an old friend to prison because she loved you. There, Dick, you are free now. Shake hands with your old Polly."

Dick held out his hand. Polly threw her arms round his neck, and kissed him with a tear in her eye.

Then she went away, On the way to town, she formed a project. It was wild, perhaps, but bold: in the highest degree impudent and shameless; but it had the merit of possessing genius.

But first to Mrs. Kneebone's.

Paragon-place looked exactly as it had done when she brought the baby ten years before, and left it to Mrs. Kneebone's fostering care. In the court, there were the children playing just as when she had been there last: the same squalor, the same dirt. At the entrance stood a figure she did not remember, with the shape of an old man, and the face of a boy, leaning on a crutch, looking up Gray's

Inn-road. It was Thoozy, standing there on the chance of seeing little Bill pass by. For Thoozy's ideas of the outer world were limited. In spite of his occasional studies in the *Daily Telegraph*, he had never, by any experience of his own, arrived at a personal knowledge of any outer world except that of the heart of London. The world to him was a long succession of streets. Little Bill, taken from one Paragon-place, was, in Thoozy's mind, transported to another: perhaps a finer and more wealthy street. On warm days he hobbled to the entrance of the court, and planted himself where, should his old friend by any lucky chance come by, he could not fail of seeing him. The "vagrom man" had not yet, in the course of his travels, reached London. Possibly, for some alleged misdemeanour — more than probable, because the country police will swear anything, and it is so very common a misfortune for somebody else's fowl to find its way into a poor man's pocket—the tramp was having a few weeks' turn upon the everlasting mill.

Thoozy turned round to see where the lady in black silk—he knew the faces of the Church visitors: she was not a deaconess or a Sister of Mercy—was going to. She went straight to Mrs. Kneebone's.

The door of the hospitable mansion stood open, as was its wont, and the lady walked in. Thoozy gave one more look up and down the road. No little Bill. Then he turned back, limped down the court—rheumatics being bad in this early autumn weather—and followed the visitor. She went into the nursery, where Mrs. Kneebone was employed among her tender charges. She shut the door. Thoozy limped in after her, and looked through the keyhole, listening.

Mrs. Kneebone raised her head to see who was thus unceremoniously intruding on her privacy. In her first confusion, she dropped the baby which was on her knees. The child fell back upon its bed; and, as it instantly went sound asleep, was probably not much the worse for its fall. A special Providence looks after the lives of babies and young children, its interposition being nowhere so clearly marked as in baby farms and on board passenger ships.

"Lord bless my soul!" she exclaimed, rushing forward with effusion, and holding out her hands. "Why, it's Polly Tresle. Polly, my dear soul, and how are you, and what's got you all this time not to drop a line to your old—old friend?"

Thoozy, outside, laid down his crutch, and exe-

cuted a short dance—more agile, perhaps, than might have been expected of one so decayed. Then he applied his eye to the keyhole again. The court was quiet, and the voices were shrill, so that he heard as well as saw.

"Now don't let's have none of your blarney, Mother Kneebone. So, drop it. Where's my boy?"

"Where's little Bill?" cried the old woman, in a tone of the deepest surprise. "Where's little Bill? Why, where should he be? Didn't you send for him yourself, but Tuesday was a fortnight? And paid his bill and all?"

"I never sent for him."

"You never sent for him! Now, Polly, you always was one to crack a joke. A gentleman came himself to fetch the boy: said he was to pay for what there might be owing for him. You know, Polly, though I never would press you, I wrote you as there was five-and-thirty shillings due. So I told him, and he paid me honourable, and he gave me—what was it he gave me, now?—fifteen shillings besides. Two pound ten in all, because he said the boy looked so well-an'-'arty. And you know well, Polly—you know the soft heart of your old Kneebone as couldn't abear to see the boy

suffer, so many's the shillin' he cost me out of my pocket to keep him decent. Ax Thoozy if he didn't. Well, and the gentleman—"

"A full, big man, with a black beard?"

"Tall and big he was, surely. And a black beard? Yes. With a leg. Oh! Polly, my dear, a beautiful leg of hese own. Which if he's your fourth, Polly, and not to deceive you, my dear, for worlds, it's a happy woman you ought to be."

Polly sat down on the only chair of the room, and stared.

"But what did you tell him about me?"

"Tell him? Now, Polly, do you think I'd tell him anything? Do you think I'd do it? Not for pounds, Polly. And how well and fine you're looking, to be sure. Most as young as you did ten years ago."

"He didn't ask no questions?"

"And he did, though. Asked if the boy was happy. Bill—Oh! Polly, what a boy that is, and as like you as two peas, though a trifle thin in the face: 'cos, do what I would, he never did eat enough—he ups and he says that he won't leave his old mother. Reglar made me cry, he did, the dear. Then the gentleman — him with the leg—

he says, 'Mrs. Kneebone, you're a good woman, and the Lord will reward you.'"

"That I swear he didn't," cried Polly, knowing that Dick was by no means likely to make any such pious remark.

"Well, then, he said somethink very much like it; and asked a lot more questions. Said he wondered why I kep' that idle, good-for-nothink vagabond Thoozy about the place. What a leg he have, to be sure!"

"Who's Thoozy?"

"A baby what I never got paid for. A boy growed up here who won't work. Ah, Polly, I've had a deal of trouble to keep little Bill from being led into bad ways by that Thoozy. But I've always had a soft heart, and I couldn't abide to send the poor boy adrift on the streets, and him on crutches and all. So you see I lets him stay on, bad as he is. And I do hope you won't find little Bill none the worse for his company."

"Oh!" whispered Thoozy, "I'll be even with you for this. Won't I!"

"Then you didn't tell him nothing at all?" said Polly, staggered.

"Not a syllable—not a word—not a thing, Polly, s'help me. And you haven't shook hands yet with

your old friend as knowed you down at Poplar, when you married Bowker, and knows all your little buzzom secrets. Can't you trust your Kneebone, my dear?"

Polly got up, and shook out her skirts.

"He finds out everything," she murmured. "He knows it all. He's dreadful masterful. He's a devil—he's a devil!"

"Who knows everything, Polly?—not Bowker?"

"No. Nobody you know, Mother Kneebone. Well, I shall go. Good-bye."

"Don't go just yet, Polly. Stand a trifle for your old——"

"Oh, drat the old friend! Well, will half-a-crown be any good; because I ain't too rich? Here you are, then, and Good-bye."

"Good-bye, deary, and give me news of my little Bill. If he sends his love to his old mother, be sure and let me have it. Ah! he *was* a boy, that boy—he *was* a boy!"

"I suppose he was," said Polly, "if he wasn't a girl. Good-bye, then."

She lingered, woman-like, to look at the babies; and Thoozy noiselessly crept out, and resumed his old place at the entrance of the court.

Presently, Polly came out again.

"How d'ye do, Polly Tresler?" cried a squeaking voice in the passage.

She gathered up her skirts, and looked round.

"How d'ye do, Polly Tresler? Don't you remember me? I'm Thoozy. Lord bless you, I know you as well as if it was only yesterday. I remember your bringiug little Bill to Mother Kneebone's."

This was, unhappily for Methoosalem's credit as a truth-teller, a deliberate lie. He remembered nothing about it, though he did remember perfectly well having acted for a year or two as little Bill's dry nurse. For in early life the poor little wizen-faced cripple had developed a genius, almost matronly, in the management of babies; and, on the strength of it, had been retained on the establishment in the capacity of nurse, until, by mere force of character and his fortunate discovery, he succeeded in promoting himself to the position of chief resident physician and real master of the hospital.

"Oh, you're Thoozy, are you? And what do you mean by speaking to a lady?" said Polly, looking at him with astonishment.

"Because you are a lady, a real lady, and nothin'

but a lady, silk stockins and all. Oh, I knows a lady when I sees one. Sorry you didn't speak to me first, instead of Mother Kneebone, 'cos I suppose she has been a-gammoning of you."

Polly started.

"Look here, you boy—you little, withered-up imp—you miserable little ricketty devil—if you tell me lies, I'll break every bone of your wretched little crooked body. Just you tell me right out all about it."

It will be seen that Polly was roused to wrath by Thoozy's suggestion of 'gammon.' Thoozy gave one look of rage and spite.

"I'll be even with both of 'em," he muttered. Then he smoothed out his face, and proceeded to reply.

A soft answer turneth away wrath.

"Don't be hard upon me, missus. I'll tell you all I know. Last Wednesday fortnight, a swell comes here when Bill and me was havin' our school in the court. I used to teach Bill, whenever the old woman gave him enough to eat. You can't teach a boy when he's starvin' for food—now, can you? That day, Bill picked up a bloater, and we had it between us for breakfast. In the afternoon the swell comes in.

"'Where's Mrs. Kneebone?' he says, as grand as you please.

"'She's in there,' says I.

"'Where's little Bill?' says he.

"'What little Bill?' says I.

"'Polly Tresler's little Bill,' says he.

"'Here he is,' says I.

"'Oh,' says he."

Polly's face became scarlet—a premonitory squall of a brewing storm.

Thoozy took breath, and went on.

"Then he goes in, and we goes in after him. Offers Mother Kneebone five pounds for information. Kneebone, she pockets the dibs, and she begins.

"'Flint's the father of the boy,' says she. 'Flint was Polly's third. Polly's second I don't know, 'cos I never see him, and she wouldn't never tell me about him. And her first husband was Mr. Bowker, and he's livin' now; and I know where to put my 'ands upon him this very moment, if you please, for another five pound. Polly, she ran away from him because she——'"

"O—h—h!" It was as the roar of a tigress, and Polly turned from the boy, and rushed back to the house. Thoozy saw her go in, and looked

up and down Gray's Inn Road—not for Bill this time, but for a policeman.

He saw one providentially fifty yards down the road, and hobbled to him as fast as his rheumatics would let him.

"Come up here," he cried, taking the man by the arm: "there 'll be murder done if you don't come quick."

The policeman followed him.

They were not a bit too soon. Polly, with flaming eyes and scarlet cheeks, had the old woman by the throat, on the floor. She was kneeling on her chest, beating her head upon the boards, mad with rage. In a few minutes more, the miserable old woman would have been done to death. The policeman dragged her off. He was a big, powerful man; but he had to use all his strength, and pinned her against the wall. Then he secured his prisoner by a dodge well known to London policemen: seized her wrist with his right hand, and twisted his left arm round it upon her shoulder. The prisoner may burst away if he likes, but will break his arm in the endeavour. Polly struggled furiously for a minute or two, and then gave in. She had still sense enough left to see that the battle had better

be given over; and, for obvious reasons, she held her tongue.

Presently, the old woman began to revive. Thoozy fetched cold water, and threw it over her—a good lot at a time, because he knew how much she disliked that form of fluid. She sat up, and looked round.

"You've got to come up to Clerkenwell to-morrow. So mind that," said the policeman. "You boy, bring her along. And now, come away. If you'll promise to go quiet," he said, when they got into the open air, "I'll let your arm free."

"I'll go quiet," said Polly.

So, holding her gently by the wrist, the guardian of the peace led Polly away, and committed her to the custody of the law, followed by those of the population who had the shining hours idle on their hands, and were naturally anxious for amusement.

Polly had a bad and uncomfortable night. Mrs. Kneebone was left with a severe headache, and a shaking of the nerves so violent that it forced her to imbibe too much fortifying medicine, insomuch that she fell down among the babies, and slept there. Methoosalem administered the feeding bottles; took away the old woman's matches to prevent

accidents with fire; and climbed to his own miserable bed, where he went to sleep, chuckling over the pious fraud by which, at one and the same time, he had paid off old and new scores. It may be remarked that his first thought had only been to reveal a portion of Mrs. Kneebone's fourberies, in order that shame, with perhaps a little personal chastisement, might fall upon her. But Polly's allusions to his own physical defects carried him a little beyond the limits of a pure practical joke, and very nearly ended fatally for both Polly and his old woman.

In one or two of the papers there appeared, two days after, under the head of police news, a short account, headed "A Row in a Baby Farm," which described how a woman, calling herself Mrs. Flint, a widow, of no occupation, was charged with violently assaulting an old woman named Kneebone, the keeper of a notorious baby farm. Evidence being heard, the worthy magistrate, without going into the antecedents of the prisoner, against whom the police had nothing to allege, remarked that it was clearly a very brutal assault upon an aged and infirm woman. He cautioned the prisoner very seriously on her ungovernable temper; remarked that it was well for her that the principal witness

was able to appear that morning to give evidence; and sentenced her to a penalty of £5 fine, or a month's imprisonment, with hard labour. The money was paid on the spot.

Thoozy led home his old woman, not sympathizing much with her shaky condition, which he attributed more to the strong drink than the fright she had had.

"How did she go for to find it out?" said Mrs. Kneebone. "You little devil, you told her."

"Never told her nothing. How should I know who she was? Perhaps she met the big swell in the road. I thought I saw him pass," said the mendacious one."

CHAPTER THE EIGHTH.

FTER Mr. Eddrup's confession, Frank met him almost daily. The old man used to go to his court every morning at ten, and sit in his office —a single room — which was like the gate of an Eastern city, inasmuch as he sat there and administered justice. Haroun Al Raschid could not have been more just, Saladin was not more merciful. Thither came the women with their quarrels: "Forgive, forgive," he said. Thither the men out of work brought their tales of disappointment and privation: to these he lent money, or pointed the way

to work. Here he received his rents, which amounted to a goodly sum, and devised means for the improvement of his dwellings. The court was a model. All the houses but two belonged to him. Gradually, by slow degrees, they had been pulled down and rebuilt in flats, with whatever improvements Mr. Eddrup and his builder could devise. The property paid him about two and a half per cent. Side by side with his stood the other two houses—squalid, mean, and decayed. They paid a good fifteen per cent. to the man—he was a leader at Exeter Hall, and knew nothing about his property except that it paid—to whom they belonged. Mr. Eddrup did what he could even here—persuaded the people to be clean, and made no difference between them and his own tenants.

One thing everybody knew: they might rob their landlord, refuse to pay his rent, maltreat him. All these, in the old times, they had done. He would never prosecute or use the law. He received his own by their good grace. Strange to say, he hardly ever lost by it. Old inhabitants of the court—especially one man, who had been the worst of the flock, and was shrewdly suspected of having personally robbed Mr. Eddrup, one dark night—protected his interests. Nobody was allowed to shoot the moon; public opinion was against it.

Nobody told lies about back rents and the reasons for asking delay; public experience had proved it useless. Truth, when it does as much good, is much more pleasant to tell than a falsehood.

At one o'clock, Mr. Eddrup left his office, and generally went away home—that is, to Skimp's—where he sometimes sat in the dingy drawing-room, but oftener sat in his own single room, reading or writing, till dinner time. After dinner, he went back regularly to the court, when he lectured in the "chapel," as they called it, on some evenings, talking freely on all kinds of subjects connected with those branches of social science most useful and interesting to his flock; sometimes taught in a night school; sometimes paid visits among the people.

A scholar, a gentleman, wrecked in early life, he had the courage to make of his miserable fate a reason for a life of philanthropy and self-denial. What he might have been, had his power of resisting temptation always been as great, who can tell?

He talked freely at this time to Frank; told him of his hopes—they were all centred in that small row of houses where he spent most of his day; and of his fears—they were all for the future of his people when he should be gone.

"I might leave the property in trust; but in a

few years the letter of the will would be executed, and the spirit neglected. A man can do no good after his death. Better let the money go, and trust that the work may go on. I have seen so much of charitable trusts, that I know the evil they produce; how they pauperize the people, and take away their self-respect. I will have none of them. If only, Mr. Melliship, some men like you would take up the work."

"I cannot," said Frank. "I am one of those who only approve of good things, and stand idly by."

"There is Silver, the acrobat. He speaks well. But he would make the place a hot-bed of religious enthusiasm. Nevertheless, he has a burning spirit, and will some time or other become a preacher. I will speak to him about leaving his profession."

"Make him take his daughter away too, then. Patty has no business with that kind of work at all."

"Poor girl," said Mr. Eddrup. "When her father asked my advice, I had none to give him. Then she came herself. Said she knew nothing which she could do. The family kettle is very small, but it was hard to keep it going. I let her have her own way. But she is good and modest. Don't tell me she is not, Mr. Melliship, because I love the child. I have seen her grow up."

"I think you love all the people about you."

"I do," he said, simply, "God knows I do. I have been drawn to them by the thousand ties that struggle and endeavour engender. They were ignorant; I had knowledge. They are poor; I have money—enough, at least, to help them. They desired good things; I could show them the way to some good things. Never think that the poor are ungrateful; never think that they are forgetful; never believe that they are in any respect, whether of good feeling, of delicacy, of forbearance, inferior to yourself. Manners are but conventionalisms. In my court there are men and women with as good manners, so far as consideration for others and unselfish labour go, as you will see in women and men of the highest culture in England. They are not better than the rich, I suppose; but they are as good. And remember they are tempted tenfold as much. Tempted! Good God! when I think of myself, my miserable fall—when I see these people resist, I am fain to go away and weep by myself for shame, and cry for deliverance from the body of this death."

He was silent for awhile. They were walking in the garden of Granville-square, which they had all to themselves.

"Love them? Of course I love them. I know all their secrets. They bring me all their troubles. They tell me all their sins. They confess to me. St. Paul says it is good for men to confess to one another. He means not that priests have anything to do with—the great-hearted preacher was too wise for that: but he knew that when the soul is burdened with sin and misgiving, the mere telling is a relief and a safeguard. We sin; we fall into temptation; we fall into evil; our minds are clouded. As prayer is a purification, so confession is an unburdening. In the darkness, evil visions rise and horrible forms dance before our eyes. We let in the light by confession—they vanish and die away. St. Paul knew what he was talking about. Mr. Mellishp, my heart is full to-day. Come and hear me next Sunday evening. I have a thing to say to the people which must not longer be delayed."

Frank knew very well what the thing would be. He went, with Patty and her father, prudently silent as to what was to happen.

It was a crowded night. Every bench was full—the women and the men hushed with an expectancy of something about to happen. Patty and Frank, with the boy, took their seats, as usual, on

the last bench. They were used to Frank by this time, and only supposed that he "kept company" with Patty, who was known to be a good girl, of eccentric habits of dress, which she gratified, with her father's sanction, at the music hall. In other words, her profession was no secret; and she was looked upon with considerable respect as a public character of unblemished reputation.

They had the usual hymn—one of those quiet old Wesleyan psalms, different from the jubilant strains of modern Anglican hymns with which we nowadays proclaim a confidence and exultation we are very far from feeling. Not a triumphal song, not a meaningless rapture set to pretty music, not a vain and false celebration of an unreal New City; not a lying wish to behold beauties which would pall upon us in a week, just as much as the Crystal Palace; but a hymn in a minor key, attuned to the sadness that always fills the poor man's heart—one that they could sing with fervour, because it belonged so fully to themselves.

Then Mr. Eddrup rose, and, contrary to his usual practice, began to speak himself without asking if any had aught to say.

He commenced by reminding them that he had been among them for forty years. He told how

his desire had been to communicate what little knowledge he had, and to do good, as best he might, with what little means he had. He reminded them of the duties of self-reliance and self-respect. He showed, for the thousandth time, how ignorance and sin are interwoven with all human suffering; how the former can be slowly removed, and the latter is generally a departure from the laws of nature. And then, with a great effort, he raised himself erect, threw back the long white hair off his face, and told them all his story.

Not with apologies; not with excuses; with no embellishments. The plain, black ugly story: the story of violated trust and ruined honour, of disgrace, of prison. He hid nothing.

"Such I was," he said. "This is my history. I have always meant to tell it. I put it off, half in cowardice, half because I thought I would wait until you learned to love me—till your hearts yearned towards me, even as mine does now to you. I think I have never till now won your perfect confidence. Only of late has it been impressed upon me that some of you look up to me with reverence and affection. To me—to a convicted thief! Therefore, I could wait no longer. My children—I have seen most of you grow up; you have been

in our schools; I have taught you: you are in very truth my children—you must respect me no longer. I am not worthy. I am meaner than the meanest—lower than the lowest. I am a convicted thief.

"Years ago I dreamed of this night. I pictured to myself how I should feel, standing before you all, with shamed face, telling you all that I am nothing better than a convicted thief.

"Respect me no longer. I have never been able to respect myself. Tell your little ones that the old man with white hair was not fit to sit among them; point your fingers out at him as he goes down the street, call after him, hoot him. He has been an impostor, a hypocrite, a deceiver. He pretended to be—

"No, my children, no—I am no hypocrite. I am a coward; because I should have told you all this long years ago. No hypocrite. Believe me, in this my solemn confession, that I repent and have repented. I have set myself to hide from the world, and work in this little corner, the servant of you all. To repent. Before you all, and in the face of GOD, in whose presence I stand, I say that I repent, and am heartily sorry. Shall I say more? Nay, for I would not that you think I should excuse myself. Let me have your pity—your pity, since I can no

longer have your love. And pray for me—pray for me."

He sank upon his knees, his head in his hands, resting against the handrail; and, as he ceased, the women began to lament, and to cry aloud for sympathy and pity. Down the rugged cheeks of the men the great tears fell unchecked. Some of them sobbed and choked. All looked bewildered at the spectacle of the poor old man, their benefactor, their patron, their saint—more to them than even Wesley was to his people—kneeling before them all, silent, bowed, abased. Frank wept unrestrainedly. Here was no acting. It was the truth, sublime and gracious. It was the final self-sacrifice of a man whose whole days had been a long sacrifice. He had LIVED THE LIFE. Truest Christian, noblest warrior in the army of God—he had won the last battle he would have to fight on earth before he was called away—

> "Not in entire forgetfulness,
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory shall he come
> To Heaven, which is his home—"

to alter the words of the poet.

It was Mr. Silver who broke the silence.

"We have one thing to do," he said. "We are

here, a little congregation, the people of the Lord, met to pray and praise. One of us has told the story of his life, and of a great sin. Let us then pray that we be not led into temptation. Who shall cast a stone? Will you?—will you?—shall I? God forbid! Our respect for him remains—our love remains. Friends all, I adjure you, lock up this thing in your hearts. Women, don't speak of it to each other: men, hide it away. Put the recollection of it out of your minds. Friend and father of us all. God has forgiven. We have forgotten."

From the voices of all there went up a mighty cry.

"We have forgotten—we have forgotten!"

Silver tried to raise the old man. He had fainted. They brought water and sprinkled over him, as he revived. He sat, feeble and pale, while the women, in their tender way, busied about him. Then he signed to Patty to come to him.

"Go home for me," he said, "and bring down all I want—I will never leave the court again."

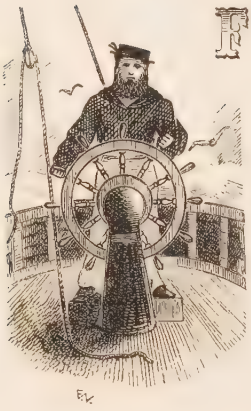
They took him to a vacant room in one of his own houses. They laid him in bed, and sent for a doctor. Nothing was wrong with him—only feebleness, only a sudden break-up. And from his little

room, where he daily received his people, Mr. Eddrup was never to stir again.

Frank went home with his friends, strangely agitated and moved. He had for once obtained a glimpse of the highest life—the courage which meets everything, which shrinks from no trial; the patience which endures to the end; the life before which all other lives appear so mean and paltry. Of the women in the room that night, all wept but one. Patty Silver sat with dry eyes. Her heart was full of questionings and doubts. She heard but half of what Mr. Eddrup said; for her eyes were bent furtively on Frank, and she was thinking if he loved her. "He loves me—loves me not." Surely, when the Deluge came, and the whirling flood swept down the shrieking street, Marguerite, in her chamber, sat deaf and careless, thinking only, "He loves me—loves me not."

But that story which Mr. Eddrup told his friends lay buried in their hearts. They never spoke of it in his lifetime. They never speak of it now he is dead and gone to that silent Land where his honour, like the soldier's sword, has been restored to him.

CHAPTER THE NINTH.



FRANK sitting in Mrs. Skimp's drawing-room with Captain Bowker. It is in the morning, but the master mariner is smoking his long cherry-stick pipe. Time hangs somewhat heavily upon his hands since he has had nothing to do. Sometimes he takes the boat and goes down to the docks, where he picks up old friends, and spins old yarns. Sometimes he pays visits to ancient haunts at Poplar. Sometimes he makes a morning call upon his cousin, who lives close by, to please whom he has come to live at Skimp's. For the Captain has money—he got it in private ventures during his many voyages—besides the little pension which his late employers

have given him. It is not much ; but it is enough to make it desirable to retain him near the family, for fear of foreign and malign influences. More often than anything else, the Captain spends his mornings at the table in Mrs. Skimp's drawing-room, with a sheet of paper and an inkstand, making innumerable blots as he corrects and adds to his poems. This work, indeed, constitutes the real pleasure of his life. To read his verses aloud, in the presence of a man who will listen without laughing, such as Frank Melliship, is pure and unmixed happiness. To get them printed is a dream which he just permits to himself. Some day, he thinks—some yet distant day—he will sacrifice the hundred pounds of capital needed to accomplish this object. He must pinch to make up for the loss of five pounds a-year ; but what is a little pinching in comparison with so great an object ?

To-day he has been reading a remarkable poem, his chef-d'œuvre, on which he means to base his reputation. It is called " The Captain's Dream." In this work, imitating, unconsciously, the example of Dante and several other distinguished " makers," he has embodied in a vision the whole sum of his philosophy. Frank has been pretending to listen. The good-nature which prevents him from yawning in the honest Captain's face, also obliges him to

come, from time to time, and pay Mr. Bowker a visit, in order to give him pleasure. I, who yield to no man in the quality of good-nature, have ruthlessly cut out the whole of the Captain's poem, which is among the records from which this history is compiled, solely because it might bore my readers. I am far from saying the work is not remarkable in many ways: there is a flavour of the briny in it, a smell of pickled pork, occasional whiffs of rum, a taste of the pannikin, the breath of the ocean. Nautical metaphors alone are used—seafaring similes. We are on board ship, and the wind is whistling through the shrouds. But—but—truth compels me to add that the poet's diction is common-place and his thoughts not always exalted. Why do we not consider the varieties of the human mind in our estimate of poetry? There are gradations of intellect, like terraces. Instead of measuring a newly-fledged poet with a stupid, Procrustean bed of criticism, reducing all to one standard, why not make an effort to classify intellectual produce, as merchants classify colonial produce? I believe there are, in the single article of sugar alone, about twelve gradations from treacle to crystal. Suppose we made twelve grades or degrees in poetry? Our greatest poets would belong to the twelfth—the

supreme degree which embraces all the rest. As every poet must have some brains, if only a thimbleful, it follows that he must have a very large mass of mankind beneath him. Martin F. Tupper, for instance, might be numbered one, or perhaps two, on account of some gleams of scholarship. Captain Bowker would belong to the first grade, without any possibility of promotion at all.

"So, Mr. Melliship, there's all my ideas for you. When I get more, I stick them in. As I go on living, the poem will go on growing—consequently, improving."

"Do not your ideas change sometimes?"

"Never. When I get an idea, Mr. Melliship, it isn't a flash in the pan, like some people's. My ideas take me first of all unawares. They generally begin, like a toothache, when I least expect them. Perhaps, when I feel a little buffy, in the morning; mayhap, after an extra go of grog the night before. Then one comes all of a sudden. I turn it over, and think it out. I'm raythor a slow thinker; but I'm an uncommon sure one, and I never let it go. I don't read much, except the newspaper; so that I've got a great advantage over most poets. All my ideas are my own. I don't steal them and alter them. I let 'em grow. It takes me a long time—

perhaps months—to work an idea into shape, but when I have got him, there he is, put into the poem neat and ship-shape, preserved for cure, like a bit of salt beef in a cask of brine. Woman, now—you remember the beautiful passage I read to you just now about woman?"

"Yes—yes—yes. Oh! don't take the trouble to read it again, Captain Bowker," cried Frank, hastily.

"A few lines to show my meaning," said the Captain, clearing his throat. "Here we are. Now listen :—

"'Woman is like a ship—new painted, gay,
Fresh holystoned and scraped, she sails away,
Manned by her captain. While the weather holds,
The ship sails trim, the woman never scolds,
The dancing waves play on the starboard bow,
Her sails fill out, her pennants gaily flow ;
The captain takes his thankful grog below.'

That's a good line, young man. That last is a very good line."

He read it over again, shaking his head slowly from side to side in admiration.

"'Look where ahead the black clouds rise, and see
How changed the lines of ocean ; on the lee
The rocks rise threatening. Furl the mainsail, stow
All snug : here comes the tempest. Let her go.'

"I leave out the next fifty lines, where I follow up the comparison of a good woman to a good ship. She weathers the storm. Then I go on to talk of a bad woman; and I end thus:—

"'All lost—the ship obeys the helm no more.
She strikes—she sinks. Her voyages are o'er!'"

"Very fine," said Frank—"very fine indeed."

"Yes, I flatter myself that there is good stuff there. They've compared woman to all sorts of things. Look here. Here's a bit I cut out of an old play:—

"'A woman is like to—but stay—
What a woman is like, who can say;
There's no living with or without one:
Love bites like a fly,
Now an ear, now an eye,
Buz, buz, always buzzing about one—
If she laugh, and she chat,
Play, joke, and all that,
And with smiles and good humour she meet me,
She's like a rich dish
Of ven'son, or fish,
That cries from the table, "Come eat me!"
But she'll plague you, and vex you,
Distract and perplex you,
False hearted, and ranging,
Unsettled, and changing,

What then do you think she is like?
Like a sand? like a rock?
Like a wheel? like a clock?
Aye, a clock that is always at *strike:*
Her head's like the island folks tell on,
Which nothing but monkeys can dwell on,
Her heart's like a lemon—so nice
She carves for each lover a slice;
In truth, she's to me,
Like the wind, like the sea,
Whose raging will harken to no man;
Like a mill,
Like a pill,
Like a sail,
Like a whale,
Like a flow'r,
Like a show'r,
Like a fly,
Like a pie,
Like a thief,
Like, in brief,
She's like nothing on earth—but a woman!'

"Now, you know, it's all very fine. That's not my notion of a simile. Don't hurry about from one to another to show your cleverness. Stick to one. Woman is like a ship, isn't she? Very well—there you are. Work it up, as I do. There's her hold, must be laden or in ballast; a woman without ballast is like a cork on the water. Her head is the captain's cabin—only room for one.

The captain is the man at the helm. As for the rigging, some of it's ornamental, some of it's useful. You've got the bunting, and you've got the sails. The sails is her petticoats, without which, d'ye see, she can't sail out of port; the bunting is her ribbons, because they all, ships as well as women, sail better if they're proud of themselves. And as for her masts, her boats, her keel, her bowsprit, and her foksle, and all the rest of it—why, bless you, if I had time, I'd run through the whole and show you how the simile holds. Ah! it's a very delicate subject. Marriage, now. People will get married. Why? The Lord knows. I did myself once, and a pretty market I brought my pigs to. Ease and comfort? Quiet and tranquillity for composing? Not a bit of it. Morning, noon and night went her tongue. It was 'Jem, get this,' 'Jem, go there.' And if I didn't, squalls, I can tell you."

"Well, but you were the man at the helm," said Frank, with a smile.

"Man at the helm! I might as well have been in the bows, she stayed below all watches. She wouldn't answer the helm nohow. Never took no notice of the helm. Kept her own course. Never was such a craft. Neat to look at, too. Painted

rosy red in the bows; full in the lines, but clean cut, down about the stern; always neat and tidy in the gear. But come to command her—Phew!—then you found out what a deceptive, headstrong, cranky, difficult vessel she was. Ah, well — it's fifteen years ago since I saw her."

"Is she dead, then?"

"Hush," said Captain Bowker, "don't speak so loud. If she aint dead, where is she? She left me; went cruising on her own account; took in another skipper, may be. Anyhow, she went. We've gone away from each other. Dead? Well, she's as good as dead. Don't you ever marry, Mr. Melliship. You're a young man, and the temptation will come strong over a young man at times. Fight it. St. Paul says himself it's better not to marry. I heard that in church last Sunday morning. Say to yourself, 'Which shall it be? Shall it be peace and repose; or shall it be nagging, and pecking, and boxing of ears? Shall it be your legs on the fender and your pipe in your mouth; or shall it be the legs of the chair about your head, and the pipe smashed? Shall it be fair weather or shall it be foul?' There's more craft built for show than for use in these bad times. Don't trust any. Stick to yourself and be happy. As for me,

Mr. Mellishp, I'm a fixture. Nothing can disturb me now. I'm in port. I defy the storms. To quote myself, I sing—

> "'Laid up in dock, serene I shake my fist,
> And fortune's storms may thunder as they list.'

Those are very fine lines, Mr. Mellishp—very forcible, strong lines indeed—

> "'Laid up in dock, serene I shake my fist,
> And fortune's storms—'"

"Please Cap'n Bowker"—it was the red-armed Mary Ann who interrupted him—"there's a lady wants to see you."

"I suppose it's my cousin," growled the Captain. "Why can't she wait for me to go and see her? It's my turn, too."

"No 'taint Mrs. Robins," said Jane, who knew the Captain's belongings; "this lady says she's your wife!"—grinning all over.

The Captain's arms dropped, and his face turned an ashy white. Frank laughed at first; but the poor man's distress was so great that his sense of the ludicrous was lost in pity.

"Found me out, has she?" he murmured. "After fifteen years—'Laid up in dock, serene—'

No, that won't do. Mr. Melliship, wait a moment. Don't go and leave me in this pinch. Can't nothing be done? See her. After fifteen years to go back to prison! It's more than I looked for. Tell me what to do. Help me to ride out the gale."

"There is nothing to be done," said Frank. "But perhaps you had better see her. Suppose she is not your wife, after all?"

"Stay with me. Stand by an old shipmate. Don't desert me, Mr. Melliship."

"But I can't interfere between you and your wife. Be brave, man. You ought not to be afraid of a woman."

"As an ordinary rule," said Captain Bowker, clearing his throat, "there aint a braver man going than me. Not another woman in the world I'm afraid of. But this one's an exception. You didn't know my Polly. I don't care for the rest of 'em, if they were all to come on together. But Polly's too much for any man."

There was a rustling of a dress on the stairs, and Frank waited for a moment.

A tall figure in black silk, with a thick veil, glided in. As Frank glanced at her, somehow he thought of Market Basing and Parkside.

"Don't sheer off," murmured the Captain, in an ecstacy of terror.

But Frank stole softly out of the room, and closed the door, bringing the red-armed one down with him. She had followed Mrs. Bowker up the stairs, with intent to listen at the keyhole. Mrs. Skimp and her daughter were at the bottom, with the same laudable object.

"Now, Mrs. Skimp," said Frank, "no listening."

And he sat down on the bottom steps by way of precaution.

"Oh! Jem," cried Polly, falling on the Captain's unresisting neck, and kissing his grizzled forehead —"oh! Jem, to think I should find you, and after so many years, and your dreadful cruel conduct. Oh! this is a blessed day!"

"How did you find me, Polly?" asked her husband.

"Went to Leggatt and Browne's — your old firm. The clerks told me. This is a blessed day!"

"D—— the clerks," said the Captain. "And why didn't you go before, if you wanted to find me?"

"Because I thought you were dead, Jem. I've wore black ever since in mourning for you. See

here. They told me at Poplar that you was alive, and where to ask for you. Oh, what a joyful thing to find your husband after fifteen years!"

She pulled out her handkerchief, and began to weep; but not plentifully.

"Well, what's to be done now?" asked the Captain.

"That's a pretty thing to say to your wife," she answered. "Done! What should be done? I've come to live with you."

"Oh!" groaned the Captain.

"I'm not going to live in a boarding-house. How much money have you got?"

He named his modest income.

"That will do. We shall have lodgings. What's the name of the woman of the house?"

"Skimp."

She went to the head of the staircase, and called out—

"Mrs. Skimp! You Mrs. Skimp! Come up here at once."

Frank quietly went away.

"We're going to leave this to-day," said Polly. "A week's notice. Bring the bill in ten minutes. I'll pay it. And none of your extras for me."

"You don't stay in my house another hour," said the aggrieved Mrs. Skimp. "Cap'n Bowker, I'm ashamed of you. I pity you, I do. Paying attentions to my daughter, too."

"Eh!" said Polly. "What's that?"

"I never did," said the Captain, outraged and insulted. "They're all upon me, together. I never did. I'm—I'm—I'm DAMNED if I did! Mrs. Skimp, what do you mean by saying such things? And you a married woman yourself, and know the misery of being married. You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I never looked at your daughter, even. I never look at any woman."

"You won't pay her any more attentions, for you shall come out of this place in quick sticks," said Mrs. Bowker. "How long will it take you to pack your things up?"

"Well," said the unresisting seaman, fairly overstunned by the logic of facts, "I think to do it comfortable, you know, it might take a couple of hours."

"Very well," said the lady. "You pack everything up—mind you don't leave nothing behind you in a place like this—and I'll just go down to Poplar and let 'em know as I've found you, and I'll

be back here before the two hours are up. This is a blessed day!"

She gave the Captain one chaste salute, shot a look of anger at Mrs. Skimp, and marched out of the room.

CHAPTER THE TENTH.

ONE fine morning at this time, Dick Mortiboy said to his ward, when they were out for a ride together—

"Bill, I do you the justice to believe that you don't care very much about your mother."

The boy shook his head.

"And you would not want to go away with her—to live with her, I mean?"

Little Bill's cheeks changed colour, and he turned his blue eyes appealingly at Uncle Dick.

"Very well, my boy, then never say anything about her."

The boy was mounted on an old pony that had been used occasionally to carry old Ready-money

It was very quiet and easy in its paces, and Dick had given his protégé a few lessons in horsemanship before they had ventured so far into the country together.

Of course, in a gossiping, tittle-tattling little place like Market Basing, there was an abundance of rumours rife concerning the parentage and history of little Bill. Widely as some of these reports differed from others in many particulars, they were all agreed as to one essential: it was that he was young Ready-money's son. I have never heard that anybody connected the boy with Polly.

Now, I do not say that Dick Mortiboy's argument concerning his ward was sound or just; but it was charitable. He argued thus:—A few months ago I was told this was my son. I had not seen him. I did not love him. I was a poor man, and I contributed what I thought sufficient for his support. The boy had the reputation of being my son. Now I have seen him, and know that he isn't mine. I like him, and I'll take care that he gets some of the benefits he would have got if his mother's tale had been true."

It was rather from impulse than from reason that

Dick Mortiboy had acted. He was big, and rough, and generous. He had taken the boy from Mrs. Kneebone's tender care, and brought him home with him. He had hardly thought of what he should do with him. He meant, after a time, to send him to school; for the boy was bright and sharp as a needle, and, till he talked, was quite a little gentleman in his new clothes.

As he looked down at the child's thin face and deep blue eyes, his heart grew soft. It seemed as if he had missed something all his life, which he was finding now. What he had missed were the influences of love: now they were upon him. He loved a woman. True, she did not love him; but she cared in a way for him. It was something to know that Grace loved him "as a brother"—as girls are fond of saying when they mean that they feel a friendly interest in a man, but would rather not have him making love to them.

Then came the boy. His love for Dick was wonderful. His loyalty and obedience to what Dick told him, the pains he took to do everything that Dick said was right, his confidence and trust —all this touched Dick, and moved him: it was the first step upwards—to something like repent-

ance. Only as yet, the faintest glimmer, like the first gray streaks of light in the east.

So Dick Mortiboy rode along gently, on the strip of grass by the side of the turnpike road, thinking of many things, when he became aware that his ward was calling out lustily—

"Mikey O'Grady! Mikey O'Grady!"

The boy was in the middle of the road, some twenty yards behind. He had reined in his pony, and was addressing by name a ragged, shoeless, dust-covered tramp. Dick stopped his horse.

"Mikey O'Grady," the boy called out again.

"Shure enough it's me name, your honour," said the man, hat in hand.

The boy pulled up his pony, and called the tramp to him.

"Mikey O'Grady! Mikey O'Grady!"

"Shure enough and it's me your honour," said the man.

"Don't you remember me, Mike?"

The boy took off his cap, and shook his light hair over his eyes.

The Irishman gave a yell of delight.

"It's little Bill," he cried.

Dick listened to this colloquy, and said nothing.

"You're going to London, Mike, ain't you? Go

to the old place, and find out Thoozy. You remember Thoozy, don't you? Well, then, give Thoozy my love—tell him that I am very well, and very happy, and—and I wish he was."

Poor little Bill's eyes began to fill with tears.

"Give him the message, my man," said Dick. "Tell him, too, that when I come to town I shall go and see him. Perhaps I shall have something for him. And here's something to help you on your way."

The Irishman promised, and went on his way. Dick said nothing till bed-time came, when he patted his ward on the head, and said—

"Good boy, good boy. Another commandment, Bill. Never forget old friends. What is the whole duty of a boy?"

"Never steal—never tell lies—never swear—hold his jaw—do his work—go away from England—always be ready to fight—look out for shams—never be satisfied—never forget old friends. Ten of 'em now, Uncle Dick."

"That's a curious coincidence," said Uncle Dick.

On the morning after his refusal by Grace Heathcote, Dick Mortiboy went down to the bank, full of his new purpose. It was to make George

Ghrimes and Frank Melliship his junior partners in the concern. The foundry and the brewery would still be managed by Ghrimes for Dick's sole benefit; but he had made up his mind to rehabilitate Frank's fortunes, and reward the honest and able services of Ghrimes, by doing what he thought was to both a simple act of justice.

Young Ready-money was not an adept in the art of speechifying, and did not know exactly how to begin. He set forth his intention to Ghrimes in a sort of preamble about Frank.

"Ghrimes," he said, "I've been thinking things over a goodish deal of late, and I've got a proposal I want you to consider. When I was a boy—before I went away from the governor—if I had a friend to say a word for me and give me a hand, besides John Heathcote, it was my uncle Melliship."

"He was a very good sort, poor man," said Ghrimes, guessing half of what was about to come from his employer.

"He was," Dick assented. "Well, Ghrimes," he went on, "they've got a sort of rough notion in those rough parts I lived in a good many years that one good turn deserves another. The very roughest there act up to it. It is not a bad maxim, Ghrimes, anywhere. It seems to me that it is not

affected by climate. My uncle Melliship did me many good turns. Now I'm going to do his son one good turn: for I'm bound to help Frank. That's all clear, isn't it?"

Mr. Ghrimes nodded.

"Good. I knew you'd agree to all that. I've a word or two more to say before I've done. There's the man who greases the wheels—and there's a good many of 'em to grease—of my affairs, who keeps everything straight and square, and adds to the pile I've got already."

Mr. Ghrimes turned rather red.

"That's you, Ghrimes. You see it. Well, I think I'm bound to do something for you."

The manager of Dick Mortiboy's business looked at the pattern of the carpet, and said nothing. He had not had time to find words yet.

"What can we do best for all of us? The old bank was Melliship, Mortiboy, & Co. Why not revive the old title by taking Frank and you into partnership?—Mortiboy, Melliship & Ghrimes."

"Never alter the name of a bank," said Ghrimes. "The most unlucky thing that can be done. Remember Snow's bank, in the Strand."

"Well, we'll have it Melliship, Mortiboy & Co. I don't quite know how these things are done; but

I suppose there will be something to sign written in a big hand."

"A deed of partnership would have to be prepared, of course."

"Very well. You will do all that. Arrange it with Battiscombe."

Dick put on his hat.

"Stay, Mr. Mortiboy—this won't do."

"We're partners now, Ghrimes. Call me Dick."

"Well, then, Mr. Dick. I don't know how to thank you for myself. As for Frank, it is an act which I call noble. I say it is noble, Mr. Mortiboy—I mean, Mr. Dick."

"You wouldn't if you knew everything, perhaps," said Dick. "However, what is the hitch?"

"Why, this: we must arrange terms of partnership, proportions—all sorts of things."

"I will see Battiscombe, then, at once. We will have a deed drawn up on terms which shall be advantageous to yourselves, and consistent with my desire to do a mere act of justice. Ghrimes, my father was the real cause of Melliship's failure and suicide."

"To some extent, I am afraid he was," said Ghrimes. "If your father had been a different sort of man, poor Mr. Melliship would have had no

scruples about asking a little accommodation from him: especially as he knew how easily he could give it. But your father always seemed to me to be trying to get him into his power. Not to break him, and ruin him; but to keep him in his power. Your father always loved to have people under his thumb."

"Just so, and my uncle Mellishipp's death was a protest against my father's way of dealing. We are doing simply an act of reparation. Go-to-meeting folks sometimes do acts of reparation, besides repenting of their sins, I hope, Ghrimes? That's their affair, not mine, however. I'm going to write to Frank and make him this offer. He'll accept it; and as soon as he comes down here we can all three sign Battiscombe's parchment, and enter into our partnership."

He went away. Bethinking him, however, that the letter should be written at once, he turned into his father's house in Derngate to do it.

He was very careful about this letter. He began by reminding Frank of their relationship; of the many kindnesses he had himself received from Frank's father; of the friendly and affectionate terms with which Mr. Mellishipp had received him on his return. And then he went on to enlarge

upon the unhappy connection between his own father and the failure of Melliship, Mortiboy & Co. After this he proceeded to state his proposition.

"And now, Frank, having said so much, I have something to propose. I was yesterday talking about you to Grace Heathcote, and I have her authority for saying that she entirely approves of the proposition. What she approves of ought to be law to you. It is that you enter my bank as a partner, on equal terms with Ghrimes; that the name of Melliship be added to Mortiboy & Co.; that you come down here at once, and begin as soon as the deeds are drawn out. I hope you will see no obstacle to your accepting this proposition. Remember it comes from your first cousin, the man who owes a hundred debts of gratitude to your father; that Grace wishes it; that it will enable you to marry; in time, to pay off those debts with which your father's estate is encumbered; that it will do what is most desirable for your mother and Kate —bring them back to Market Basing; and bring you back, if this is anything, to all your old friends. Ghrimes is most eager that you will see your way to accept my proposal. He is as anxious as any one to see you back again, and in your right position."

He folded his letter, put it into an envelope, and took it to Lucy Heathcote, asking her to forward it to Kate Melliship, who in turn would send it to Frank.

Lucy was with his father—she was old Ready-money's constant nurse and attendant—and was walking by the side of the poor old paralytic, while Hester pushed his Bath chair along the gravel terrace at the back of his house.

The aspect was sunny, and every fine day the old man was twice wheeled out to take the air. His state of late had been a good deal improved, and Lucy was full of hope. At first he had been unable to move at all, and, besides, had been generally almost unconscious. Then as he got a little better, he had recovered the partial use of one arm, and his wits had brightened very much. He was so far recovered now that he knew everything that was said to him quite well — expressed acquiescence with a slight nod of his old head, and conveyed intelligence of refusal or dislike to anything by wrinkling his forehead into a frown.

When Dick came near him he puckered his face in a dozen ugly ways.

Probably, he only half recollected what had taken place on the night he had the stroke; but

it was clear to his son there was some memory left of that night's doings. Young Ready-money did not trouble his father with much of his company. Lucy had got a porcelain tablet, and wrote with a blue pencil on it. This she held before the old man, and kept writing a fresh question, till she found out what he wanted. This process was often a very tedious one ; but, with practice, Lucy Heathcote became very expert in understanding what was passing in her uncle's mind. His appetite was good ; but as his faculty for tasting his food was gone, he had no disposition to quarrel with his cook. They gave him a little weak brandy and water to drink ; and he spent his time between his bed, his sofa, and his Bath chair, happily enough. When Dick handed Lucy the letter for Frank, the old man frowned hard, as was his wont. The young man instructed his cousin as to the destination of the letter, asked after his father, and then strode away across the lawn, down the garden, and over the river towards his own little villa.

"Why does Uncle Richard always frown so desperately at Cousin Dick whenever he comes here ?" Lucy Heathcote asked herself.

She was frightened at Dick, and never had loved

him much. She already suspected there was something wrong—what she could not tell.

Nor did she set to work with slate and pencil to worm the secret out. But her uncle's conduct, when his idolized son approached him, left a disagreeable impression upon her mind she tried in vain to shake off.

Dick followed the river, passing the scene of his exploit with Polly and the old cross where he had made known his love to Grace Heathcote. This was a sacred spot, and he sat musing under the shadow of the decaying stone for a good half-hour.

The river wound round the base of the hill on the top of which the cross stood, and presently struck across Hunslope Park.

Following the tow-path, Dick had not walked far before he saw the earl himself coming towards him. He shook hands with him very cordially.

"We are well met, Mr. Mortiboy. How do you do? I was thinking of calling upon you to-morrow at the bank. I want you to——"

"If it is about money matters, my lord, pray see Mr. Ghrimes. I may mention that he is, or

will be in a few days, my junior partner in the bank."

"Indeed!" said his lordship, with surprise. "I was not aware that Mr. Ghrimes had any fortune, Mr. Mortiboy. I have known him for many years, of course. Very happy to hear it. Very obliging gentleman-like man."

"Glad to hear your lordship say so," said Dick. "All our customers like George Ghrimes, I think. But you were right about his having no fortune, my lord. The only capital that Mr. Ghrimes will put into my concern is incorruptible honesty, untiring zeal, and high capacity for business—unless I add to the credit account, my lord, my gratitude for fifteen years' faithful service in the firm of Mortiboy & Co."

It was rather a high-flown speech for Dick to make, and he felt it; but there is something very invigorating in talking to a lord, until you get quite used to them. And young Ready-money had only lately left a Republic behind him.

His lordship's business with Dick was to tell him he wished to overdraw his account to a greater extent than it usually was.

"I shall have to write a great many cheques, Mr. Mortiboy: and my steward will not pay in the

bulk of the rents he has to receive for at least two months."

Dick replied—

"Of course, we shall do everything we can to fall in with your views."

"Thank you very much, Mr. Mortiboy. Pray, is that your son I have seen you riding with? I thought you were unmarried."

"So I am. That is my ward."

"We must marry you, Mr. Mortiboy—marry you, and put you into the House. You ought to sit for Market Basing."

"That's not my line, Lord Hunslope. I shall neither marry, nor go into Parliament."

"Property has duties, Mr. Mortiboy. You have, if I am correctly informed, a very—very large stake in the country. In the interests of landed proprietors, we want men like yourself in the Lower House. Dangerous times like these demand the co-operation of all who have a stake in the country."

"No," said Dick. "I am only waiting here for a while, and I shall go away again, with the boy—to the West, probably, somewhere or other. As for the property, in course of time it will go to my cousins, the Heathcotes, just as if I had never come home at all."

Lord Hunslope stared curiously at the strange man who thought so little of a great property.

"You are a young man, Mr. Mortiboy. You will change your mind, and marry."

"I am not one of those who change their minds, Lord Hunslope. I shall never marry. A large part of my property, which my father made over to me, will go, I repeat, to my cousins. When they marry, they will have, as I intend to arrange before I go away, some portion of it as their marriage dowries. My cousins are very good girls, Lord Hunslope; and, so far as I can judge of young ladies, fit to take higher positions than that which farmers' daughters generally aim at. Not that I care much about position. You see, I am more of an American than an Englishman. In the States we don't ask many questions about a man's family."

"They are very—hum—very excellent young ladies. You know, Mr. Mortiboy, that Mr. Heathcote is a man for whom I have the highest respect."

"As your lordship is not a fool," said Dick, bluntly, "that goes without saying, as the French put it. You may add, if you like, that the Heathcotes are a very old family—had all this estate long before your ancestors got it."

"That, also, I know. The Heathcotes are a representative race," said Lord Hunslope, a little taken aback by Dick's plain speaking. "Call at the Towers sometimes, Mr. Mortiboy. The countess will be very glad to see you. Come now, and take luncheon with us."

Dick made an excuse, and turned his steps homeward. The earl looked at him, striding along, great and strong, with eyes of envy. He was young and rich. The peer was old and poor.

"He's only a great boy, after all," thought the earl. "He knows nothing about our English life—and cares nothing about it."

Then he bethought him about the Heathcote girls, and their prospects, and went home.

"Have you remarked," he asked the countess, "those two Heathcote girls?"

"Grace and Lucy Heathcote? Oh, yes. I know them very well. What about them? Their manners are quiet and simple, much above their station—very much above the manners of that very vulgar person, their mother."

"I think so myself. Those girls, Alethea, will have a fortune of half a million sterling. That is, that large property will be divided between them."

The countess looked up in amazement.

"Half a million? You must be joking."

"Not joking at all. I was never more in earnest. Young Mr. Mortiboy, whom you saw at the children's sports the other day, told me himself, this morning, that he should not marry. He intends to go back to America, with a boy he carries about, and settle there. The two girls will have his money."

"My dear, he is not five-and-thirty. He may live for ever. Above all, he is sure to marry."

"He may live a long time, but he will keep his word. I have heard that young Ready-money, as they call him, always keeps his word in the smallest particular—for the matter of that, his father always did the same. He told me this with the most perfect seriousness. Now, think."

The countess smiled.

"Mrs. Heathcote is a horribly vulgar woman."

"The father is not vulgar. John Heathcote is rough, but he is a gentleman in his way. There is no man I respect more than John Heathcote. A good old family, too. They had Hunslope long before we were heard of."

"Cadwallader founded my family," said her ladyship sweetly, who had only intermarried with the earls of Hunslope. "Certainly, with all that

money, the girls would have a right to marry above their station, as things go."

"Ronald is so shy," said Lord Hunslope.

Yet this conversation was the beginning of Grace Heathcote's having a third wooer at her feet.

CHAPTER THE ELEVENTH.

ONE more incident in the quiet life of Grace Heathcote. An event which was not calculated to add anything to the sum total of her happiness, grateful as conquest is to beauty.

The particularly fine evenings of that early autumn, coupled with the recollection that croquet is a game not to be played with comfort after the middle of October, did not tend to cause any diminution in the frequency of Lord Launton's visits to Parkside.

He always had some good excuse for coming, and he did not want much pressing to take a mallet and join the little party on the lawn when he was there; but out of mere shyness, he seemed on

every occasion to pay more court to Lucy than to Grace.

It happened that, a very few days after Lord Hunslope's conversation with Dick Mortiboy, Mrs. Heathcote had Lawyer Battiscombe, his wife, and daughters, from Market Basing, spending the afternoon with her.

Mrs. Heathcote—who was very fond of showing her town friends the beauties and conveniences of country life, heartily loving to hear them praise everything that appertained to Parkside, and secretly rejoicing over their envy—had strolled with her friend as far as the little cottage where the poultry-woman lived, and where her turkeys and chickens were kept. The two ladies, with the skirts of their silks well bunched up in front of them, had hardly struggled through the ramshackle wicket into the poultry-yard, when Mrs. Battiscombe exclaimed—

"Look, dear—there's a young gentleman coming to us. Why, isn't it Lord Launton?" she added, letting down the train of her dress, quite in a flutter.

Her friend was delighted. If there was one thing necessary to complete her triumph over the pretensions of the Battiscombe girls, it was to show

off Lord Launton to their mother. She had been secretly hoping, ever since tea, that he would come. But she said, calmly enough—

"Oh, yes, it's only Lord Launton. I dare say he wants to see me or John about something."

He came up, raised his hat to the ladies most politely, and began to stammer out his business to Mrs. Heathcote.

"I am a sort of deputation," Mrs. Heathcote.

"Yes, your lordship," said the lady, smiling very graciously.

"The boys' cricket ground in the park is spoilt now—we have so many things in one part, and in the other the ground is not level; and I am come to ask Mr. Heathcote to be good enough to let them play in his home field till the end of the season. It won't be long before it is over now."

The young man took a great deal of trouble to promote athletics among the Hunslope boys.

"I dare say he will, if they don't do any mischief," said Mrs. Heathcote; "but boys are so mischievous."

"You see, the field is close to the school; and they must have a cricket-ground close at hand, if we can get them one. May I go and look if the

ground will do, if Mr. Heathcote says we may have it. I think the field is very level."

The home close was on the other side of the hedge.

"It is so close to my poultry-yard," said Mrs. Heathcote; "they all run in the field. I'm afraid the boys will pelt the guinea fowl and hens. We have often had one killed, haven't we, Mrs. Thompson?"

With the honest bluntness of speech, and stark insensibility to the claims of the peerage to complaisant treatment, which is characteristic of our peasantry when they happen to be somebody else's tenants, Mrs. Thompson replied—

"That we have indeed, ma'am. There was the white speckly hen only last week; and a parcel of young tearbacons a-rommackin' all over the field, no poultry won't do no good—to say nothing of getting fat."

"I'll be answerable for the good conduct of the 'tearbacons,'" said Lord Launton.

"It is a good deal nearer my hencoops than I like, your lordship; but I've no doubt Mr. Heathcote will give the boys leave."

She meant to prevent him from doing it, though, all the same.

There was a pause in the conversation, broken at last by Lord Launton ; who, feeling it a duty to say something, remarked, a little nervously—

"What very fine turkeys you have, Mrs. Heathcote."

The woman who kept the poultry showed the visitors her collection of birds.

"Take that water away from the coop with the ducks in," said her mistress.

And then, turning to Lord Launton, she said—

"They are two couples we're fattening, and I don't like to let 'em swill the barley-meal out as fast as they put it in."

The young man smiled.

"But, poor things, are they not thirsty this warm weather ?"

"I don't know," replied the business-like lady—"they've got to get fat."

Lord Launton moralized to himself on the miseries of the poultry-yard, until they were joined by Mr. Heathcote, who had come across his fields.

He gave his promise about the cricket-ground, much to his wife's chagrin. They strolled back to the house together, and joined the little party on the croquet lawn.

Sides were chosen afresh. John Heathcote,

Grace, and Lord Launton played Lawyer Battiscome, his two daughters, and Lucy.

Mrs. Battiscombe was charmed; but so was Mrs. Heathcote. The two dowagers sat under a great elm, on the rising ground at the top of the garden, where they had a view of the road and the village.

"Really, he's very affable," remarked Mrs. Battiscombe.

"He often comes over and plays at croquet. We like him very well."

"I hope he won't run away with one of the girls' hearts, my dear," said the lawyer's lady—as it were calling "check" to Lydia's king. She put her ring-bedizened hand affectionately on Mrs. Heathcote's arm.

"I never think of such things, Mary."

They had been schoolfellows at Miss Prim's, and kept up the farce of Christian names, though neither had loved the other for ages.

"He often comes to see us, and John likes him —that's all."

"Of course, we could never expect that he would be allowed—" Mrs. Battiscombe began; but her remark was stopped by hearing the sound of wheels.

"A carriage and pair! Why, it is Lord Hunslope and the countess," she cried, craning out her neck among the boughs.

Now it was Lydia's turn to call "check."

"Lords are as common as blackberries about Hunslope, my dear. I'm sure we never take any more notice of them than of other folks."

But she stood up, with her best cap just over the laurel hedge, and when the countess bowed, and Lord Hunslope raised his hat, she gave a complacent, vulgar little nod.

Their son saw the carriage, and turned rather red; but when it stopped at John Heathcote's gate, and then came on slowly up the gravel drive, he became quite the colour of the poppies.

The earl got out, and shook hands with the Heathcotes, and bowed to the Battiscombes.

Lydia Heathcote took the visit as a matter of course. She left Mrs. Battiscombe under the tree, and strolled up to the carriage. She had never shaken hands with Lady Hunslope before in her life, and only some half-dozen times with his lordship—generally on such occasions as, riding round with his steward, he had called to solicit her husband's vote and interest for the Blues at the county election.

But Mrs. Heathcote did not see any good in letting the Battiscombes—and through them all Market Basing—know this, and she shaped her course accordingly.

Lord Launton, recollecting that it was getting rather late, drove away in his father's carriage.

He expected to receive a sorrowing remonstrance from his mother; for the scion of the house founded by Cadwallader, had very clearly defined notions of the grades set out in the Table of Precedence—and sat, with his back to the horses, calmly awaiting it.

It did not come. All his mother said on the subject was comprised in a very few words: that Grace and Lucy Heathcote were very amiable girls, and had very good blood in their veins. William de Heathecoat, of Hunslope, was mentioned in Froissart.

Now you see the effect of Dick Mortiboy's candid confession to the earl. He had been deeply moved by the intelligence that a man so rich—so extraordinarily rich—was seriously promising not only to leave his very great fortune to his cousins, but also to endow them with a portion when they should marry, fitting their future inheritance.

As for Mrs. Battiscombe, she went home with her maternal breast full of envy and uncharitable feeling, and spread the news all over Market Basing that Grace Heathcote had jilted poor Francis Melliship's son, as she always said she would, and was trying to catch Lord Launton, as if—etc.

Mrs. Heathcote, on the other hand, was in an ecstasy of delight. She got down "Burke's Landed Gentry" from the book-case, and read all about William de Heathcote, of Hunslope. She compared the Heathcote pedigree with the Smiths—only city bankers, and so, like her own family, the great Mortiboy stock after all.

From these authentic records she drew her own conclusions; and every day she talked of Lord Launton, praised his personal appearance—the youth was by no means ill-looking, having a certain air of nobleness which comes of good breeding, and a mind kept steadily at a certain elevation—commended his manners, which had whatever merit belongs to shyness, and spoke in glowing terms of the happiness which would be the portion of that girl who might become his wife.

Now, all this fell upon the ears of Grace like the wind upon a fixed weathercock: it moved her not

at all. She did not, to begin with, understand it. In the second place, she was too full of her own cares to think much about them. Least of all did she fancy that the heir of Hunslope Towers was about to propose to her.

"Really," she said, "I think, Lucy dear, that Lord Launton has—now, don't blush, my child, because it's quite possible, and you are very pretty —has fallen—fallen—fallen—shall I go on?"

"Grace, dear," said Lucy, blushing more than ever, "Don't—please don't."

"Then I won't, Lucy."

And the very next day, Lord Launton proposed to her.

Proposed in the garden, just where Dick had made the same offer of his hand and heart. Stammered and blushed—stammered till he could hardly speak; told her, in an infinite amount of reduplicated words and any number of consonants, how he loved her.

Grace, this time, was neither pained nor touched. She only laughed.

"Poor boy!" she said. "Do you know that I don't love you at all, and never could? And do you know that you are the future Earl of Hun-

slope, and I only the daughter of a *very* plain gentleman?"

"I know," said Lord Launton. "B—b—but I have my father's permission, and your father's p—p—"

"Prohibition, I should hope," said Grace. "No, Lord Launton. NO—NO—NO! There, is that enough?"

The poor young fellow stooped his head to hide his hot face.

"Do I seem unkind?" Grace asked. "See, Lord Launton, I do not mean to be unkind. I like you very much. I cannot understand how your father could give you permission to speak to me, or my father either. But you may know that I am already engaged — to Frank Mellishipp, your old schoolfellow."

"I knew—that is, I ought to have known. G—G—G—Grace, is there no hope?—not the least hope?"

"Not the least spark. Not a glimmer, Lord Launton. And, besides, you have never paid me any attentions at all. I thought you liked Lucy better."

"That was b—b—because I loved you."

"I don't profess to understand the workings of a

man's love; but I do know this, that when Frank Melliship loved me, he did not make pretence to my sister first. He came straight to me."

"I was wrong. Oh! Miss Heathcote, I'm a p—p—poor creature. I stammer, and am afraid almost to speak. Forgive my shyness."

"Indeed, there is nothing to forgive. But, pray, Lord Launton—no, I won't ask any more questions. Let all be as it was before. Come here as much as you like, and let us be friends. Shall it be so? Indeed, I am grateful for the honour—that is, I think I shall be, when I am an old woman. I shall remember that I had a chance of a coronet. But a woman can only love one man, and my love is promised—promised, Lord Launton."

She sighed wearily. Promised—and for how long?

Poor Lord Launton stood irresolute. His painful shyness interposed between himself and all his impulses. He beat it down, and said, with a mighty effort—

"Miss Heathcote, forget what I have said. I will endeavour to conquer my love for you. I am not a selfish egotist—that is, I will try not to be. If I can help your happiness, let me try to do so."

"You may help Frank, if you can. But, alas! you cannot. Oh, Lord Launton, why have you brought this unlooked-for misery into the house?"

"What misery, my dear Miss Heathcote—what misery?"

"It is only that my poor dear mother will be dazzled by the chance that I have thrown away; and I shall have to endure her reproaches. Go, Lord Launton. If you must marry one of us, Lucy is a better match for you—not so stubborn, not so rebellious, not so self-willed; and, oh, a great deal prettier, more gentle, more Christian. She would make a better wife. Go away, my dear boy. Why, you are only a month older than I am—you are only a boy yet, Lord Launton. And I am as tall as you, see—" She smiled through her tears. "And, oh, it is such a pity, because I was so fond of you."

She took his beardless face in her hands—she was really as tall as her admirer, and looked taller, with her pile of hair—and drew it towards her, and kissed him on the forehead.

"There, Ronald, Lord Launton, that is a sister's kiss. It would be hard to alter that. We have known each other as long as—oh, since we were little things, and used to meet you in the Pond

Walk with your nurse. Be my friend—a great deal better for you, poor boy, than being my husband. Go, now, and come again just as usual."

It was a most ignominious dismissal. The heir of Hunslope Towers, conscious of having made himself an outrageous idiot, stole silently away. As he went through the house, he met Mrs. Heathcote. Truth to say, the poor lady had been to the highest rooms in the house, the servants' rooms, whose windows commanded a view of the heads of the performers in this garden act.

"Come in, Lord Launton, and talk to me," she said, graciously.

"No, Mrs. Heathcote," he stammered. "No—it's no use. She won't listen to me."

"Not listen to you? Nonsense! Not listen to you? Oh! give her time, Lord Launton. She's afraid of you."

"No—no—no. It is I who was af—f—fraid of her," he groaned. "It is no use, Mrs. Heathcote—I am refused."

Mrs. Heathcote went back to her parlour, and sat in a tumult of conflicting passions. Presently her husband came home. She said nothing. Lucy returned from choir practice. Grace came down from her own room, her eyes red with crying. She

sat silent, with a book before her. Mr. Heathcote rang the bell for supper at the usual time. They sat down, Mrs. Heathcote sighing heavily.

"What's the matter, old lady?" asked John, with a misgiving that a family row was impending.

For all reply, she burst into tears, and sighed hysterically. The girls ran to her assistance.

"Go away," she said to Grace. "Go away, ungrateful girl! After all I've done for you."

"Eh? eh? eh?" asked John, looking from one to the other. "What is it, Grace?"

"Wicked girl," cried her mother. "Oh! John, John—a coronet thrown away! Half a million of money thrown away! Grace, I was in the garden and heard you refuse your cousin a week ago; and now you have refused Lord Launton. John Heathcote, your daughter Grace refuses to marry either Dick Mortiboy or the future heir of Hunslope, because she loves a pauper—a pauper and a painter."

Grace turned to her father.

"Papa, Dick asked me to marry him, and Lord Launton asked me to marry him. I was obliged to say 'No,' because I am engaged to Frank."

Mr. Heathcote sat down to the table, and cut himself deliberately a great slice of cold boiled beef, with a meditative air. Then he took some

pickles; and then, having meanwhile turned the matter over in his mind, he said—

"Girls, sit down. Lydia, you're a fool. Grace shall marry anybody she likes. Come here, my dear, and kiss your father."

When John Heathcote put his foot down, which was very seldom, there was a general feeling in everybody's mind that the thing was definitely settled. Mrs. Heathcote said no more; but, heaving a profound sigh, she rang the bell for a candle, and retired to bed, taking the Bible with her, so that she might, at least, have the consolations of religion.

CHAPTER THE TWELFTH.

NO intelligence of Frank's whereabouts. "We only know that he receives our letters," wrote Kate, "because he answers them. They go to the post-office, Great Bedford Street. His own have for the last two or three weeks been more despondent, that is, less cheerful than ever before. They have not the true ring about them that they had. I think, though I dare not say so to mamma, that his good spirits are forced. I have written and told him

about Dick's splendid offer. It is generous in the highest degree. It is more than generous. Tell him I think it is noble. I shall not write to him myself, till I have Frank's answer. Yes—Grace. My picture was accepted, hung and sold. I was at once glad to get the money, and sorry to let the picture go. I am doing another now, just a woodland scene—painted here in the mountains—with a single figure in it ; a quiet picture, which I hope to succeed with. Only, when I have finished a picture I like, it goes to my heart to let it be sold. Frank keeps sending us money. It is such a pity, because we really do not want any. We have plenty. And we are happy again. Only nine months ago, Gracie, and what a difference !—what a difference !"

Thus far Kate Melliship. Grace showed the letter to Dick.

"There are two or three ways," he said, "of getting hold of Frank. A man can't hide himself altogether, unless he cuts off communication by letter. Evidently he doesn't want at present to be hunted up. All the same, I will go up to London and find him for you, Gracie."

"But how, Dick ? How can you find him ?"

"Well. I shall go to the post-office where his let-

ters are sent. I shall ask them who takes his letters, and how often they are sent for. If they won't tell me, I shall bribe them till they do. They are sure to do it for half a sovereign. After that, we have only to go on the day when he appears, and lie in wait to catch him beautifully. Once my hand is on his shoulder, Grace, you may be quite sure that I don't let him go again till I bring him back to you."

"When will you go, Dick?" she asked eagerly. "To-morrow? Go to-morrow, and make haste. I've got some foolish sort of nervous feeling, as if something was going to happen. I don't know what, or how. I've had it for a week. I suppose I'm not very well."

"Thunder in the air," said Dick. "If anything happens, it will be something good for you. So be ready to jump for joy."

That evening he told his little boy of his intention to go to London, and, still suspicious that Polly, of whom he knew nothing beyond the fact that she drew her pound a-week, might return in his absence and carry off the boy, he told him to be ready in the morning to go to town with him.

The fast train from Market Basing leaves at

nine o'clock, and is at Euston at half-past ten. They started to walk to the station, for Dick hated luggage and always kept changes of raiment and fine linen at his chambers in Jermyn Street. Crossing the river, Dick bethought him that he had not seen his father for some days. So he passed through the garden into the house.

Mr. Mortiboy was in his bed. Hester was feeding him with a spoon; his breakfast consisting of bread and milk. He frowned at his son as usual, and then quietly took his milk a spoonful at a time until the basin was emptied. Dick sat by the side of his bed, and watched him eat. His appetite was very good; altogether there was a great change in him. The fixed smile had almost left his mouth, and the distortion of his face was much less noticeable. Then his eye was brighter, his memory better, the cloud seems to be gradually lifting from his mind. As his son sat by his bedside watching Hester feed the old man, and thinking of all that had happened, suddenly there flashed upon his memory an old, old day, so long ago that it had never once come back to him: a day more than a quarter of a century old; an autumn day like the present, when the golden tints were on the leaves; a morning when a child he walked hand-in-hand with his father,

and asked him questions. He remembered how his father, lifting him in his arms, stroked his cheeks and kissed him; how he flung his own arms round his neck and kissed his father again. A simple childish caress: it might have occurred a thousand times to most children; to Dick it seemed only to have occurred once, because Mr. Mortiboy was an undemonstrative man, and with him such events were rare. As he remembered this, another thought came upon him: it was, that never once since that day, save when his own crime caused relapse, had his father's love ceased to burn in a steady flame. He knew it now: he recognised it even in the starved and pinched life he had been made to lead; even in the tyranny of his youth; even in the hard work and long hours to which his father subjected him—all this was to make him grow up like himself—and in the ready confidence and trust with which he received the prodigal returning home. He knew it all, in a single moment, and a sharp pain shot through him as he looked upon the wreck he had himself caused.

Dick was not one, however, to sit down and weep, throwing ashes upon his head and clothing himself with sackcloth. The thought came to him, as one which might often come again, a grave and sadden-

ing thought; his thoughts turned upon the boy whom he had adopted. Suppose little Bill should do something, should turn out somehow like himself. Then he cleared his throat, which was getting husky, and bent slightly over his father—Old Hester had left them alone together.

"Father," he said, "let us be friends again—I am sorry."

The old man moved his slow eyes upwards with a puzzled expression.

Dick looked at him, waiting, but no response came.

He joined the boy, and they set off together to walk to the station.

When Hester came back, she found Mr. Mortiboy looking troubled, and a tear or two had rolled down his withered cheeks.

"Bill," said Dick, in the train—he was quite accustomed to converse on all topics with the boy, who understood or not, as the case might be—"Bill, I wonder if we are going to have a collision and bust up."

"Why, Uncle Dick?"

"Because the Mexicans say that when a man is going to die he begins to think about the days when he was a child. That's what I've been doing

this morning. The only way you can be killed in this peaceful old country, is by a railway accident."

"I saw a boy once, run over by a 'bus," said Bill, thoughtfully.

"Yes—there are other ways, I suppose. But a smash on a railway is the most likely thing. Perhaps, after all, the Mexicans are not always right."

There was no railway accident, at any rate.

At his chambers he found a letter, dated a fortnight and more back, from Lafleur.

"My dear Dick," it ran, "I am in want of money. Please send me a couple of hundred at once."

"In any case," said Dick, "it is too late now. Want of money? What has been done with the five thousand? The System has come to grief, I suppose, after all!"

It was not pleasant to think about. The man had been started actually with all the money he asked. The partnership was dissolved; the pair had separated, each agreed to go his own way, and yet, only two months after, came this letter. Dick crushed it in his fingers, looking stern and determined.

"It shall not be," he said, thinking aloud. "Polly is gone, and Lafleur shall go. I will have no witnesses left to remind me of the old days. I will live my own life now, with the boy to bring up. Lafleur shall not be with us to bring back what I would forget. No, M. Alcide Lafleur, it will not do. Your own secrets are as bad as mine, and worse. You dare not speak, at any rate. I will give you one more start, on condition that you go away to California, or somewhere over the water, and never come back again. You shall not stand in my way. I defy any man to stand in my way. My path is clear and certain. I will start Frank and Ghrimes. Then I will go away and stay away for ten years with the boy. And then I will come back, and put him out in life, and settle down. I shall be turned forty then. I shall never marry. I have said so. There will be other children then, Grace's children, to amuse me. I shall spend the rest of my life, thirty years and more, among the children."

He took no notice of the letter, and went on to the post-office, to find out Frank, if possible. It was a poor little post-office, kept by a bookseller in a small way, perhaps a man who should be described as one who sold small books. Specimens of

his wares were in the window, cheap religious books mostly, and the doorway was filled with the affiche boards of daily papers.

Dick found a woman behind the counter, and stated his business.

"I—I—don't think it's hardly regular," she said. "People come and get their letters here, but I don't know that I ought to tell you any thing about them."

"There's five shillings, now you will tell me."

It was blunt, but effective. The woman took the shillings, put them in her pocket, and went on at once.

"I don't know anything about the gentleman who has the letters addressed to him as Mr. Mellishship. Sometimes he comes, a tall, fair-haired young man, quite the gentleman; sometimes it's a young person."

"A girl, you mean? A young lady?"

She smiled superior, and tossed her head.

"Not a lady, I should say, certainly. At least I wouldn't compare her with myself. A young woman, sir?"

"Pretty, as well as young?"

She bridled up. "That's a matter of opinion. I don't hold with a pink and rose face, and a bit of false hair."

"Is that all you can tell me?"

"That's all, sir, I'm sorry to say."

"Then you've taken five shillings out of me on false pretences," said Dick, pretending to be in a rage. "I've a great mind to report you to head quarters." The woman turned all colours. "Well, I won't this time, if you'll tell Mr. Melliship, or the young person, the next time the letters are asked for, that his cousin has been to see him, and wants him particularly. On what day does the young person come?"

"On Monday morning, always, sir, about eleven o'clock, unless he comes himself. Quite the gentleman, *he* is."

He was in the neighbourhood of Gray's Inn Road, and thought of Mrs. Kneebone's; he took his way down that thoroughfare with a view of finding out if Polly had been there, and what she had done.

Sitting at the entrance of the court was the boy Thoozy, looking wistfully down in the direction of Holborn. It was down the street that little Bill had gone with the swell; and he naturally expected that it was by that way he would return. Dick touched him on the shoulder.

He jumped up on his crutches, and grinned a perfect pœan of joy.

"Well, Thoozy," said Dick, "and how's things?"

"How's little Bill?" returned Thoozy.

"Well and strong. He sent you a message a little while ago by a tramp. Didn't you get it?"

"Never," said Thoozy. "Never. What was it?"

"Only to send his love, and you were not to forget him."

"I never forgets him," said the poor boy. "I got no one to talk to now he's gone; and the old woman's took on dreadful with drink ever since the day Polly Tresler came."

"Ah! what was that? Tell me all about it, boy. Come into the court, and sit on your own step."

Mrs. Kneebone saw them coming up the road, and trembled. Was further information wanted, and should she expose herself to another assault, of an aggravated nature? She decided at once on her line of action, and, putting on her shawl, she took a jug, and a big key, so as to show that she meant business, and sallied down the steps.

"Me-thew-salem," she said, with great sweetness, "I'm obliged for to go out for a little bit. Take care of them blessed children while I'm

away. Good morning, sir. And it's hoping you found all that I told you c'rect."

Dick nodded his head, and she passed on, seeing no prospect of further coin. "Now, Thoozy," said Dick, "tell me all about it."

If Methusalem had been born in a somewhat higher sphere of life; if he had not been lame; if his flesh, which was weak, had been equal to his spirit, which was strong; if he had been educated for the stage; he might have made a low comedian of a very unusual kind. His talent was prodigious, but his training was defective.

With an instinctive feeling that a vivid picture of Mrs. Kneebone's discomfiture and Polly's subsequent disaster would be appreciated, Thoozy enacted the whole scene with a dramatic verve which set the tragedy vividly before his listener. The boy forgot his lameness aud infirmity, mimicked their voices, alternately doing Mrs. Kneebone with her conciliatory hypocrisy, and Polly with her sulky disbelief. When he put in the finishing touch of Mrs. Kneebone's really illnatured remark about himself, Dick roared with laughter.

"Look here, boy," he said, "you are not very anxious, I suppose, to stay here all your life?"

"I'm a old man," said Thoozy, with a comical

leer. "I'm getting very old, and past work. I used to think I'd stay on here all my days; but now little Bill is gone, and I got nobody to talk to, I think a change might do me good. My doctor did recommend," he added, waving his hand grandly, "that I should take six months' holiday, and go to one of our country seats. With port wine. Says I must drink port wine, three glasses a day. As the resident physician, I couldn't spare the time, but if you press me very hard, I might get away for a bit. I say, sir," he went on, in a changed voice, "let me see little Bill again. I won't do him no harm. I never did that I knows on. Let me have a talk with him once more, only once."

Dick hesitated. Why should he not take the boy away? With all his quaint affectations, his oddities, and infirmities, he could do no harm to his adopted son. Why not take him too?

He took out a card case, and printed his address on it in pencil.

"I live here. You can read that? Good. Jermyn Street, off Regent Street. Now be careful, and listen. Little Bill is with me there. You make your way at once to St. James's Park. Wait about the door of the Duke of York's Column. I

will send Bill to you, or bring him if he doesn't know the way."

"Bill not know the way? He knows his way, like a ferret, all over London, even where he hasn't been. Bill wasn't along with me for nothing."

"Good. You two boys may spend the whole day together; bring him back to Jermyn Street at nine. As the clock strikes, mind!"

"I will. Sharp at nine."

Dick considered a moment.

"Bill's got good clothes now, too," he said. "Would you like some decent things to put on?"

Thoozy looked at his old coat and his torn trowsers, and sighed.

"Come, then. I know a man close by."

He took him to the same dealer who had refitted little Bill, and provided him with a suit of clothes, including stockings—quite unknown to Thoozy, except by hearsay, up to that time—better than he had ever dreamed of.

"Now you've plenty of time, go into Endell Street and have a bath, brush your hair, and make yourself quite respectable."

He gave him a few shillings to complete his arrangements, and walked away.

Thoozy went back to the court, amid the jeers of the populace—who recognized him, in spite of his grandeur—just to see that the babies were not coming to any harm, rescuing an infant from imminent suffocation, by reason of a corner of the sheet, which it mistook, through want of experience, for the mouth of a feeding bottle. Thoozy shook them all up, and went his way.

It was one o'clock when Dick got back to Jermyn Street.

"There's a friend of yours wants to see you very much," he said to his ward.

"Thoozy! Thoozy!" cried the boy, with delight.

"That is the party. Are you hungry, Bill?"

"Very little, Uncle Dick."

"Got any money?"

Little Bill produced two and fourpence from his pocket.

"Go on, then. You can have your dinner with Methusalem, where you like. You know your way to the Duke of York's column. Wait there till you see him."

Dick Mortiboy lunched in his own room, and then smoked the cigar of content and happiness. He embodied his discoveries at the Post Office in

Great Bedford Street, in a short note to Grace Heathcote, and despatched it to the pillar box by the woman who was in charge. This was the purport of it :—"Frank calls for his letters, or has them called for by a young woman every Monday morning. We must wait till then. Next Monday I will be there."

It was about three o'clock that a man, all in rags and tatters, rang at the door bell. The old woman in charge—all the other lodgers were out of town—opened it and looked at him with suspicion.

"I want Mr. Mortiboy."

"Give me your name, and I'll see," she said.

"He knows me. Let me pass."

The man pushed by her, and mounted the stairs. Dick's sitting-room was at the back, second floor, a small room, but big enough for his purposes. He had, besides, a bed-room for himself, with a dressing-room, in which was a bed for the boy.

He was sitting over his third cigar. He never read books, having lost the habit of reading long since. Sometimes he looked at the newspaper, but not often. He was, therefore, like Captain Bowker in one respect, that all his ideas were his own. To-day he was more happy and contented than he had ever been before since his return. All was

going well with him. Grace would not have him. Very good.

> " If she be not fair to me,
> What care I how fair she be ?"

a quotation he would certainly have made if he had known it. Unromantic as it may seem, Dick cured himself of his passion by the simple expedient of giving the girl up. He loved her no longer. Men only really love a girl—with that blind passionate devotion which burns her image upon their hearts in indelible characters, like a tattoo on the arm—between the ages of twenty and thirty. After that—experience. Men past the sixth lustrum know womankind better. They know the other sex because they know their own. They know that no women are perfect, and they suspect their own passion. Now suspicion to passion is like the sunshine to a coal fire—puts it out. Dick gave up his love with a mighty effort, because it was very strong. But having given it up, he gave it up altogether. There were no half measures with Dick. Thorough at all times. If Grace had accepted him, no husband could have been more true and more faithful than he, more attentive, more thoughtful. Just as he had been a thorough rogue, just as he

was going to be a thorough "respectable," just so he would have been a thorough lover. But it could not be, and therefore, as a philosopher, he acknowledged that it was better not to think of it. Now his plans were changed. To go away altogether, to take the boy with him he was now considering—even the thought of taking Thoozy, too, crossed his mind—to come back after many years. This was his new programme. As he lay back in his easy chair, his handsome face breathed a sweet spirit of hope and cheerfulness, and with every fresh cloud of tobacco came another castle of contentment and repose.

His door opened. He looked round to see who it was, but started to his feet at sight of the miserable object before him. Alcide Lafleur stood in the doorway. Ragged, starving, pinched and footsore, his old partner stood there in front of him, staring at him with haggard eyes.

"Good God! man," he said, "what is this?"

"Did you not get my letter, Dick?"

"To-day, this morning. What is this?"

"First give me money to get food and clothes. I am almost starving."

Dick thrust all the money in his pocket into Lafleur's hands.

"Go quickly. Get things and then come back. Take my latch-key, and return as soon as you can."

Lafleur took the money and the key, and crept away.

Dick lit another cigar. But the current of his thoughts was rudely disturbed. The clouds of tobacco were angry and threatening now, and filled with coloured pictures. He filled and drank three or four glasses of wine in succession. Then he sat down doggedly to wait, with his hands in his pockets. Presently the old woman came up.

"If you don't want me, sir," she said, "I've particular business and should like to go out this afternoon."

She resented the appearance of lodgers in September, when everybody, including the landlady, was away, and she was not inclined to put herself about, to please anybody.

"Oh yes," said Dick, "you can go. I'm not likely to want anything. Be back by nine, the boy's coming in then and will want some supper."

It was a little before six when the front door slammed and a footfall sounded on the stairs.

A moment afterwards M. Alcide Lafleur, washed, shaven, trimmed, and dressed, darkened the thresh-

hold of his old partner's room. He was rehabilitated and, at least, externally restored to the semblance of his former state.

"Sacré" he exclaimed, pinching up the sleeve of his new coat and turning it round; "what a climate!"

There were great rain spots on it. He wiped his new hat with his new cambric handkerchief.

"Never mind the rain," said Dick Mortiboy. "Now tell me all about it. How came you to get into such a mess?"

"Light your gas first, my friend," said Lafleur; "it is cursedly dark in this little hole——"

It was dark; the clouds were black: a thunderstorm had burst over London.

Dick put a match to his gas.

"Young Ready-money is the sobriquet the respectable citizens of your native village have conferred on their philanthropic millionaire," he continued, with that thin, sneering smile of his on his face. "I think if Alcide Lafleur had either the title or the money he would somewhere in London have found an apartment more distinguished than this is."

He looked round Dick's simple sitting-room and shrugged his shoulders. Gentlemen of his temper-

ament soon recover themselves. Lafleur had already recovered. He was the same man that had got Dick Mortiboy out of the prison in Palmiste ; that had traded with him, run the blockade with him, gambled, swindled, and lied with him. Lafleur was unchanged. But his partner was no longer Roaring Dick, and the company of his old companion was distasteful to him, his voice grated on his ear.

"The rooms do for me, Lafleur: nobody knows me, and if they did it would not matter."

"Always so careless, so rough. My dear Richard, if I had your money," he heaved a sigh: he thought of what he had given up in giving back Dick's word to him. "Ah! how unfortunate I have been —how lucky, you! and you are content with a hammock, a beefsteak, and a pot of beer!"

"Have you actually lost all?" asked Dick abruptly.

"My cursed luck," replied Lafleur, looking at the rain beating down the window. "How it pelts! Ma foi!"

"Never mind the rain, tell me all about it," said Dick a second time, and Lafleur told his story. It took him half an hour to tell it, but briefly it was the story of every man who ever went to Hom-

bourg to break the bank — except that lucky thousandth one who breaks it. At first luck was with Lafleur ; night after night he went home with every pocket stuffed with gold pieces.

"Dick, if you had been with me I should have landed the grand coup—twice—instead of beggaring myself. You have pluck—dash—élan. You would have carried out the system and piled the money on. I was a coward ; I hesitated. It came to putting down two thousand in one stake — the bank had been winning enormously, they would have covered any stake—the cards seemed bedevilled. And I dared not do it. Like a mad fool, I left the table. Dick, the next time did it. If I had only had pluck I should have landed myself with a profit of five thousand pounds on the run."

He laughed—"As I always told you, the more the run was against you the more you must win—at the end. My System is perfect. I was the fool."

"Well," said Dick Mortiboy, "you had lost all ?"

"Stay. Half—all my winnings and half the money I took with me. Cool as I am, old hand as I am, my dear Richard, my nerve was gone—for the time. Not at the run against me. At my contemptible folly. I ran over to Wiesbaden and

played a week at roulette. I won a five hundred there and then came back to Hombourg. The very same cursed luck attended me again. I had not pluck to put all my money down at one stake. I hesitated, and was lost again. My head was gone. I deserted my System and played with the reckless folly of a madman——"

"And you were cleaned out?"

"Lost every farthing. But Dick, you would have saved me. The System is perfect. Carry it out, and I defy you to lose—my want of pluck beat me."

"A cool player, Lafleur, but you always wanted courage."

"When all was gone I thought of you. I knew you would never turn your back on an old friend. I thought I would come back here to you, for more money." Dick's face, as he heard this confession, grew hard. "I sold my clothes, and my rings, and watch; but I lost money on the way. I had only enough left to bring me to Newhaven. Dick, I have walked from Newhaven to London on tenpence, one franc, upon my honour. Of all my possessions I have got nothing left but the six shooter you gave me ten years ago."

Dick got up and began to pace the room.

"Lafleur, let me say what I think, and then you shall speak. Our partnership is dissolved. You have given me back my word. You know that I never say things unless I mean them—when I sought that dissolution, I meant a complete severance of our connexion. I meant that you should have no claim upon me—not the least—for the future. I belong to a different world henceforth. Go your way, and let me go mine. That is what I mean still. I am not surprised that the System has broken down—they always do. No man ever yet could invent, or will invent, a scheme to meet the chances of luck. When it isn't luck, it is skill. Now you know exactly what I mean, state exactly what you want me to do."

Lafleur turned white. Tell an inventor that his model is worthless, the model over which he has grown grey: tell a poet that his poem is balderdash, the poem over which he has spent his life: tell a mathematician that his integrals are as useless as the mediæval scholasticism, those integrals on which he has sacrificed his youth—do all these things with impunity—you will only wound. But do not tell a gambler that his scheme is a mistake and a delusion. You will madden Him.

He clutched the arm of his chair, but said nothing.

Dick went on.

"You know, Lafleur, in spite of our dissolution, that I cannot let an old friend come to grief without my trying to help him. Now I will do this for you—I will give you five hundred now, on condition that you go to America, and I will send you a thousand when I know you have arrived. Think it over."

"Go partners again with us, Dick, only in the System, you know. Come over to Hombourg, and play it yourself, with your own splendid luck. Dick, we must win, I am certain we must win. Bring ten thousand with you. I will be a half-partner, a quarter partner, anything. Only let us try it once more."

"No."

Lafleur made no further effort. He knew his man.

"I accept," he said after a few minutes.

Dick took his cheque book and drew a cheque on his London agents for five hundred pounds.

"What is the day of the month? the twenty-third? I have filled it in with the twenty-second.

Never mind, it will be all the same. Keep the condition, Lafleur, or I don't keep mine."

"Some men would threaten you, Dick," said Lafleur, pocketing the cheque. "I do not. I think you are treating me hardly, but I do not threaten."

"I should like to see the man who would threaten me," said Dick calmly.

Lafleur, whose whole bearing was changed,, who had lost his ease and assurance, made no answer to this remark.

"Give me some brandy," he said after a pause; "I am a good deal shaken, I don't quite know what I am saying."

He drank a glass neat, and then had a tumbler of brandy and water mixed half-and-half fashion.

"Voilà. I feel better," he said, putting on a little of his old style.

He walked to the windows and looked out.

"How cursedly it pours down. What are we to do?"

"You can stay and smoke a cigar."

They smoked for some minutes in unbroken silence. The only sound in the room was the pelting of the rain against the window panes.

"Dick, may I propose half an hour at euchre:" he said this doubtingly, half afraid that Dick would

refuse. "It is a long time since we played—we may never play again together—let us have a last game."

"I don't mind playing a game or two, Lafleur," he said. He took out his watch, "it is half-past seven now, I shan't play after nine; I shall leave off as the clock strikes. I've got an engagement then."

The first half-hour was over. The clock struck eight and the rain had ceased. The luck was all on Dick's side. He had won thirty pounds of Lafleur. It was scored down on a piece of paper.

"Shall we leave off? You're not in luck, and I don't want to win."

Lafleur begged him to go on. "Lend me ten again." Dick passed the money over the table, and made the score on the paper forty. At half-past eight the debt was a hundred.

"I won't take the money of you," said Dick.

"You shall take it," said Lafleur, tossing off another glass of brandy, "if you leave off a winner. Come on, deal the cards, we have only half-an-hour."

When half of that half-hour was gone, Dick Mortiboy sprang from his chair, leaned across the

table, and brought his hand heavily upon the sleeve of his adversary's coat. In it was a knave, the best card at euchre, which Dick dragged forth.

"Swindler," he cried, "you would even cheat me" He pushed back his chair, turned over the table, and flung the cards in Lafleur's face. "Give me back my cheque," he said sternly, "I have done with you."

Without saying a word, the Frenchman flew at him like a tiger cat. Dick stepped lightly aside, and received him with his left. He fell heavily. He rose again, however, in a moment, and went at him again. A second time he fell. This time he lay on the carpet with a livid face, and for a moment appeared not to move. But his white hand stole stealthily to his coat pocket. He half turned as if to rise, Dick watching him with flashing eyes, and then—then—the sharp crack of a pistol, a column of smoke, a heavy fall, and Dick Mortiboy lying flat on his face. Lafleur started to his feet. He had shot his adversary as he lay, without taking the pistol from his pocket. He leaned over Dick for a moment; he did not move; he turned him on his back; his eyes were closed: he breathed heavily. He unbuttoned the waistcoat: the bullet had entered his chest: he saw stains of blood

upon his shirt. Then he went outside to the landing, and listened. Not a sound. He went to Dick's open desk. In it were about twelve sovereigns and some notes. He took ten pounds in gold, leaving the notes ; put two of them in Dick's pocket. The keys were in the desk. He locked it, and placed them on the mantelpiece. He did this to prevent suspicion of robbery. Next he picked up the table, and hid the cards away, and put the furniture straight. Then he drank another glass of brandy.

One thing he had forgotten—the pistol—he laid it in the hand of the fallen man. As he placed it in Dick's hand, the fingers clutched over it.

And then he took his hat and glided out of the room.

He came back a moment after, and bent over Dick's face.

Dick neither moved nor spoke.

Enough. Lafleur stole gently away, down the stairs, out of the house, stepping softly through the door. He closed it after him, but the latch did not hold. The clock of St. James's church began to strike the hour of nine as he reached Piccadilly.

There was not a soul in the house. Jermyn Street, in September, is a howling wilderness. No

one, save people at the back, heard the pistol shot. No one saw Lafleur enter or go away, and Dick Mortiboy lay supine, the wet beads of death clustering on his forehead, his life blood welling away from his wound.

CHAPTER THE THIRTEENTH.

WHAT did he think of, as he lay there? —of his wild life, his lawlessness, his crimes?—of the singular chance which had landed him on the shores of respectability and fortune?—of his aims and hopes for the future? A man's thoughts when Death stares him in the face, are comprehensive. He thinks of all. In a dream, even of half a minute's duration, you may live through a lifetime. The Eastern monarch dipped his head into a tub of water, and straightway left his sultanship and became a wanderer for twenty years. At the end of that time he found himself lifting his head out of the water again. This adventure had taken him one minute to accomplish. A man told me that

he slipped once in the Alps, and glided for two or three hundred feet, expecting instant death. He was pulled up, I forget how, and saved from death; but in that brief space he lived all his life over again. The dying thief upon the Cross,—model and ensample of all who repent at the last moment,—at the close of his last hour, when suffering gave way to torpor and physical pain, and one would fain hope, became only a deadened misery, may so have lived in a moment through all his life, and seen clearly what might have been.

Who can tell what thoughts crowded into the brain of poor Dick Mortiboy, lying there alone and untended, stricken to death? I, for one, cannot. I only know that he was softened and changed of late weeks: that many things had quite suddenly become clear to him; that the old carelessness was changing into gravity; that he was beginning to recognize the evil of his ways; that life had changed its aspect. Wealth had done this for him: wealth that works in many ways, turning the unselfish man into the voluptuary; or the selfish man into one who lives and cares wholly for others. Wealth brings with it its curse or its blessing, just as its recipient is disposed. It is a means to make a Tiberius, or it may make its ..... Here the

law of libel interferes, or I might name one who has great wealth, a giant's strength, and owns it but as a trust for the improvement, as best he can, of his fellows, a single-hearted, honest man, a rich man, for whom the needle's eye is as easy to pass, as for the poorest pauper who breathes with resignation and dies with joy. So would it have been for my Dick Mortiboy. But at the moment when the tide was turned came the stroke of fate, and he who might have done so much, was forbidden to do anything. Ah! the pity of it—the pity of it.

At nine o'clock—before the old woman returned —came back the boys from their day's holiday. Laughing, radiant, happy, little Bill, followed by his limping companion, strangely diffident now, with his changed and glorified "young 'un," sprang up the steps of the house in Jermyn Street. They found the door open.

"Come in, Thoozy; come up with me. Uncle Dick said you was to come, you know."

Thoozy followed up the stairs, while Bill, running before with the impetuosity of a Peter, reached the door of Dick's chamber, and opened it.

The lamp was out. They stood in darkness. Only on the floor before them a black form.

Bill stopped and looked. A blank dread filled his soul. He trembled ; he dared not speak. Behind him he heard Thoozy's crutch as he limped up the stairs. He waited.

"What's that, Thoozy ?" he whispered, pointing to the floor.

Thoozy did not answer. The light on the staircase was in his eyes, and he could see nothing. The two boys, clinging to each other, stood shivering with fear, as in the doorway Thoozy made out, in the twilight, the figure of a man upon the floor.

"Go and get a light," he whispered. "Run, quick. Do you know where to find one ?"

"They've always one on the stairs," replied the other. "Don't move, Thoozy ; don't move."

He disappeared. As soon as he was gone, Thoozy entered the room, and, kneeling down, felt the face of the man who lay so still. It was that of Uncle Dick. He knew it by the long silken beard. A whisper reached his ears.

"Go—fetch a doctor quick. Get a light—water, for God's sake."

Bill returned at the moment. Thoozy snatched the candle from him, and got a carafe from the bedroom, from which he poured a few drops into the dying man's mouth. He sprinkled his

face. And then little Bill, who had watched him with pale face and trembling lips, fell headlong on the ground, weeping and sobbing, kissing the cheeks and lips of his patron, and crying in his agony—"Oh! Uncle Dick—Uncle Dick."

"Give him more water," said Thoozy; "I am going out for a doctor. Don't let him move till I come back."

Thoozy limped away, forgetting his crutch, and poor little Bill heard him descend step by step.

He was left alone with Dick. Terrors of every kind assailed his heart. He could not speak. All he could do was to lie along the floor, his cheek against Dick's, to feel him breathing, to know that he was living.... Minutes that seemed hours passed slowly away. At last he heard footsteps again. Thoozy was returning, bringing some one with him. It was the doctor. Thoozy's good sense led him into Waterloo Place, where he knew there was a policeman; of him he got the address of the nearest surgeon. The policeman went with him, suspecting something wrong. The doctor was at home, and came at once.

He took the candle and began to examine his patient. A weak whisper greeted him.

"I have had an accident," Dick murmured feebly.

"Half an hour ago—an old pistol—shot myself in the side—no one in the house to help me—left side—don't move me—I am bleeding to death."

"More light," said the doctor, "Boy, light that lamp."

It was a moderator, the mechanism of which was unknown to Thoozy.

The policeman lit it.

Then the doctor unbuttoned the waistcoat and looked for the wound. On the floor lay the pistol; he trod upon it. The policeman took it, and after carefully looking at it, placed it his own pocket.

"One chamber fired," he murmured. "Who is he?" he asked Thoozy.

"I don't know. He knows. Bill knows. He was a goin to do something for me; he gave me these clothes to-day, and told me to come at nine," sobbed Thoozy.

"Who is it?" The policeman called to little Bill.

"Mr. Mortiboy," said Bill, as if all the world knew him.

"Does he live here always?"

"No: he lives at Market Basing," said Bill, trembling, in spite of the last few weeks' experience, at sight of a policeman. "He's my Uncle Dick."

"He isn't really his uncle," whispered Thoozy. "He took care o' little Bill. He's no relation at all—told me so hisself."

Meantime the doctor was at work. His face grew very grave. Dick opened his eyes with an effort, and looked at him.

"How long?" he asked.

"It is a very serious accident," began the doctor.

"How long?" repeated Dick, in a hoarse whisper.

"Perhaps half an hour."

"Take paper, and let me make a statement to save trouble."

"Speak very low," whispered the doctor, "I can hear. Do not exert yourself more than you can possibly help."

Dick began in a faint voice—

"I—Richard — Melliship — Mortiboy — declare that I—have—accidentally shot myself, while preparing to clean my pistol."

You see, he was true to his old partner to the very last. Went out of the world with a lie on his lips, to save him.

The doctor wrote.

"Place the pen in my hand and guide me. I

want to sign it, in presence of yourself and the policeman," said the dying man.

It was done. With faltering fingers Dick traced his name for the last time.

"Have you any testamentary depositions to make or alter?"

"Give me—water,—brandy,—something."

They held up his head—the forehead dank and cold, the cheeks pale, the eyes only opening from time to time with an effort—and the doctor gave him a spoonful of brandy. This revived him a little.

"Write," he said.

"Dearest Cousin Gracie, I am dying. You can find Frank easily. All my money will be yours and Lucy's. Let Frank and Ghrimes be partners. God bless you, my dear. If I had lived I would have—"

Here he stopped. Presently he went on again—

"Remember that I love you for all you have done for me, but that I give you up freely and entirely. Let the money go back to help the poor as much as may be."

He stopped again. Another spoonful of brandy.

"Tell my father—" Here he paused; a strange

look of bewilderment crossed his face. "Ah!" he sighed, "it is no use now to tell him anything. I shall tell him myself."

The doctor thought he was wandering.

"Where is little Bill?" he whispered.

The doctor put the child's face to his.

"Oh, Uncle Dick! don't die! Don't die, Uncle Dick!"

Dick kissed the tear-wet cheek that lay upon his cheek, and his head fell back.

"Poor little chap," he murmured.

They were his last words. A moment after, without a sigh or a groan, he turned his head to one side—they had brought a pillow from the bed-room—and opened his eyes no more. Dick was dead. Ah! the pity of it—the pity of it.

"Coroner's inquest," said the policeman. "Were you here, my boys?"

"No," said Thoozy. "We found him here. He told us to come at nine."

"Can we telegraph?" said the doctor.

"Who to? We may look in the desk. These boys can't help us. Go to bed, my lads," he said, in a kindly voice. "You can't do any good here."

They searched the desk. No sign of an address.

There were no cards upon him, and no letters.

"We might," said the policeman, "we might send to the police office of Market Basing for information."

Thoozy followed little Bill to his bed-room. Both were crying and lamenting.

"Bill," said Thoozy, after a pause, "it's all over; he won't help you and me no more. He's dead, is Uncle Dick. Why couldn't I die? I'm no use in the world to nobody. I've got no money; I've only got rheumatiz. Why couldn't I die, and Uncle Dick live? Come, Bill, it's no use stopping here no longer. Let's go, you and me."

"Not back to Mother Kneebone's," said Bill.

"No, not back to Kneebone's. Let's go a long way off, miles away, where they won't find us, and live together. How much money have you got, Bill?"

"I've got a sovereign. He gave it me yesterday."

"I've got three shillin'. He gave it me to-day, and we've got our clothes. Let's go, Bill."

He took the child by the arm, and they stepped out stealthily upon the stairs, and crept down, Thoozy leaning on Bill.

When they got into the street, Thoozy led the

way eastward. They passed through Covent Garden, and down Drury Lane. They walked up Fleet Street, Ludgate Hill, Cheapside, and so on to the Whitechapel Road. In fulness of time, after many stoppages—for they slept an hour on this doorstep, and an hour on that—they arrived, when day broke, somewhere in the East End of London, where there were masts of ships innumerable.

"It's the docks," said Thoozy. "Now we'll wait and look about us."

In the afternoon of that fatal day old Hester was pushing Mr. Mortiboy's bath-chair slowly round the broad gravel paths, according to her wont, in front of the house in Derngate. Lucy Heathcote walked by her uncle's side, now and then saying a kind word to the old man, to rouse and cheer him. She had been more hopeful of his recovery of late days; the worst symptoms had improved; his eyes were brighter; he had begun to be interested in little things about him; and his features had gained back something of their old expression. In her hand was the Bible, from which she was reading favourite passages to her uncle. In health he never would be "read to," in his sickness he made no sign of dissent. Lucy's

presence soothed him. He loved to have her near him. She knew he liked to hear her voice, though his poor palsied wits seemed to have neither memory nor understanding. So she read on.

She was stopped by a loud cry from Hester.

"Oh! Miss Lucy! look at your uncle, miss! Oh! what *shall* we do!"

Lucy dropped her Bible. The old man's face was suddenly distorted fearfully, and he lay back on his pillows breathing heavily and laboriously. He had had another stroke. The girl thought he would die there; Hester was helpless from fright.

"Run—run—for the nurse—then send for Dr. Kerby—don't lose a second," cried Lucy.

The nurse came from her tea with her mouth full of bread and butter. She was calm and unmoved in the young girl's grief and the old servant's terror. She was quite equal to the situation. It had been her business to see people die. She showed her superiority by giving her orders calmly.

Hester was despatched for the doctor.

"There's death in his face, miss. Let us take him in. He won't be with us many hours now."

Sobbing grievously, Lucy lent her hand to wheel the dying man into his bedroom. The window opened on to the lawn.

"Oh, how horrible it seems, nurse! Oh! let us try to get him out of his chair! Oh! poor Uncle Richard—my dear—my dear!"

He was a heavy weight—dead weight—for he could not move hand or foot—both sides were palsied now; but the arms of the nurse were as strong as a man's. With little help from Lucy she got him on to his bed.

The girl—sole one among his relatives who had ever *loved* old Ready-money Mortiboy—fell on her knees by the bedside and prayed to God.

The old man turned his eyes towards her. She saw he was still conscious.

"Oh! uncle," she implored, "try—try to pray—try to follow my words. Uncle Richard," she cried in an agony of grief, "oh! Uncle Richard—try to make your peace with God."

But Mr. Mortiboy was unconscious again.

The doctors came in a few minutes. Their language was plain; they did not try to disguise the truth. The period of the old man's life might be reckoned in minutes. They could do nothing—but they stayed to see the end.

Ghrimes was sent for. He alone knew Dick's London address. It was past eight o'clock before he came back from the country, where he had been

on business. He came—touched his old master's powerless, helpless hand, and hurried away to the telegraph office to summon Dick from London. Vain errand!

For five hours from the time of his last stroke the old man lay on his bed like one dead. He breathed, but every moment with less strength. To Lucy Heathcote it seemed like five days. Her father and mother were there with her, but she thought only of him who lay dying with them all round his bed.

The death struggle came at nine o'clock. There was an inarticulate sound first from the old man's lips. Then he *spoke*. They all heard it.

He said—"My—son—Dick," and lay there—dead.

"Dick ought to be here at half past ten," John Heathcote whispered to his wife.

CHAPTER THE FOURTEENTH.

DICK'S letter to Grace arrived at Parkside before the news of his death, which was brought by one of the bank clerks sent out by Ghrimes at eight o'clock. Grace was reading the letter which promised to find Frank in the course of a week, and had just passed it over to her father, who read it with much satisfaction. Mrs. Heathcote, too, read it, but with different feelings, which she was studying how to express with due effect, when the

messenger of evil tidings from the bank, arrived in Dick's own dog-cart.

The farmer was with him for five minutes. He came back with pale cheeks and quivering lips.

"Dick," he gasped, "Dick...he's gone...dead... he shot himself by accident last night, and died an hour afterwards. Poor Dick! Poor Dick!" He recovered after a little. "Strange they both died at the same hour. A telegram came to the police office this morning at eight. They sent round to Ghrimes. Ghrimes has sent for me. Poor Dick! poor Dick!"

The presence of a tragic event like this melted for a moment the animosity of her mother to Grace. They fell into each other's arms, sobbing and crying. Dick was dead. Dick the generous: Dick the noble: Dick the true and brave. Dick was dead. Nor was it for a full half-hour that Mrs. Heathcote, recovering herself the first, was able dimly to realize the change that this event might cause to her. Dick was dead—alas! poor Dick! But then—but then—all the fortune—the half million of money—whose would this be? Whose should it be, she asked herself, but her own? And already beginning the imaginary reign of splendour over which she had brooded so many years, a

dream interrupted by Dick's return, she held her handkerchief to her eyes, and in the intervals of weeping indulged in delicious visions of grandeur.

Mr. Heathcote found Market Basing literally in tears. The people, nearly all tenants of the great Mortiboy estates, were gathered in knots, discussing the event. No news was come except by telegram, but there was scarcely any room for doubt. Dick Mortiboy was dead. The women wept aloud: the men in silence: all had lost a friend, the kindest hearted friend they ever had: the most ready to help, the most able to help. Not one to whom Dick, in his short reign of four months, had not done some kind action: not one who could not speak from experience of his soft heart and generous nature. As the farmer drove through the crowd that besieged the bank with enquiries, the fresh tears rose to his own eyes, and he got down at the door almost crying like a child.

No one cared about the old man now. Dead? Ready-Money dead? Well, he had been a long time dying. He had passed away, four months ago from men's minds.

John Heathcote arrived at the bank, went through to the manager's office, where he found Ghrimes

was there with Battiscombe, to whom Ghrimes had sent, after despatching his message to Parkside.

"Do you know of any will?" Mr. Battiscombe asked Ghrimes.

"None; I have the keys, I suppose we ought to look."

In Dick's private safe, business papers in plenty, but no will. Stay, a packet labelled "Private: to be opened after my death."

"Open it," said the lawyer.

Ghrimes opened and read it. It was short and concise. It was the confession of Polly Tresler. As he read it, his face assumed a puzzled expression. He handed it over to Mr. Battiscombe, who read it unmoved. Lawyers are seldom surprised at anything which appears abnormal to the rest of mankind. Ghrimes was shocked at the idea of Dick's secret marriage.

"That explains," he whispered, "the early quarrel between himself and his father. That is the reason why Dick ran away."

"Perhaps. It is hard to say. No great crime for a young fellow to be beguiled by a woman into making a fool of himself," said the lawyer. "It is as pretty a confession of bigamy—trigamy, even—as ever I read. Names, dates, churches, all given.

Upon my word, this woman is an exceedingly clever person. It is signed by her, and written by poor Mr. Mortiboy, himself, dated too, only a fortnight ago. Mary Tresler—Mary Tresler—I know her, daughter of that drunken old gipsy woman who married my father's gardener, a long time ago. Ah! dear me!"

"What is to be done?"

"Clearly, we must first establish the truth of her statements. I think, Ghrimes, I had better go to town and see to this myself, to prevent complications. Meantime, say nothing to the Heathcotes—to anybody. There may, besides, be a will. To prevent raising hopes in their minds, tell them, what is quite true, that you don't know whether any will was made or not. You know, of course, that if there is no will, Mrs. Heathcote is the sole heiress—she inherits everything—everything."

Then Mr. Heathcote arrived.

"We must have a coroner's inquest," said Mr. Battiscombe, "there must be a funeral—there is everything to be done. Will you come to town with me?"

"No—yes—what shall I do, Ghrimes?"

"Go, by all means. The train starts in half-an-hour. I will send a message to Parkside.

Go up to town and see the last of your poor cousin."

They went to London : down to Dick's chambers, where they found the doctor and the old woman in charge. The doctor was standing by the bedside, with his chin on his hands, thoughtfully gazing on the stark and stiff form which lay covered with a sheet. He gently took off the sheet from the face.

"You are his cousin ?" he said, "I am taking a last look at the unfortunate man. It is a singularly handsome face : a face of wonderful sweetness and goodness—a good man, I should say. And the most splendidly built man I ever saw. How *could* he have done it ?"

The lawyer was reading Dick's last words, his only will and testament. John Heathcote solemnly looked upon the features of him who had been almost his own son.

"He says he did it by accident," said Mr. Battiscombe."

"Yes—yes—but how? how? Look here," the doctor drew back the sheet and showed the spot where the wound had been inflicted. "You see the place. Very well, then ; now take this pencil, hold it any way you like, and see if you could shoot

yourself in the left side, so far back, if the pencil was a pistol. I defy you to do it. It is very odd, yet he said he did it."

Coroner's inquest that evening. Intelligent jury, after viewing the body, and reading the paper, Dick's last imposture—heard the doctor's doubts, and pooh-poohed them. Shot himself? of course he did. What did it matter how? as if a man would lie about such a thing as that. Verdict—"Accidental Death." The worthy coroner adding some severe strictures upon the frequency of gun accidents, and men's carelessness in the handling of weapons.

Dick was dead. The good that he had time to do lives still; the lives that he quickened, which were dead under the weight of grinding poverty and servitude, if they have relapsed to their old misery, which some may have done, have still the memory of better times, the knowledge of better things, and therefore nourish a healthy discontent. The stirring of the blood which his example and his words caused: his oration to the children which will never die out of their minds: his charity, for the first time in Market Basing, unconnected with religion and three sermons every Sunday: his sympathy with the fallen: his tenderness to the

falling : his kind and rough wisdom : his unbookish maxims : his ready hand : his quick insight into humbug—all these things, and many more, make him to be remembered still. These live after him : the good that he did was a seed sown in fruitful soil, still growing up, destined to be in the after years, a goodly tree, indeed. And the evil, does that still live? I know Palmiste pretty well, (because I've lived in the island ; he never did harm *there*, except to himself) well, you see, I haven't been to California, or to Texas, or to Mexico, so I do not know. If ever I do go to either or any of these places, I will inquire.

Poor old Ready-money was buried three days after his death in the family vault, unostentatiously, quietly. No one was present at his funeral, but Ghrimes and Mr. Heathcote, with the lawyer. No one followed in token of respect. All his money had gone from him before he died. Therefore, all his respect. No property left ; of course, he was no longer of any account.

It was felt that a public funeral was due to his son. Mr. Hopgood, the Mayor, had orders to prepare a simple funeral. But all Market Basing turned out to it. There was no mock mourning. It was no feeling of simple respect for property

which brought all the women with the men to see the last of one who had been with them so brief a space, and had made himself so loved by all. Not one but had a kind word of his to remember him by: no poor man but had more than a kind word: no eye that was dry when the earth rattled upon his coffin, and the sublime service of the Church was read over his remains.

His pensioners, the old men and women, were there, loudly wailing. Those whom he had saved from starvation, like old Mr. Sanderson, the cashier of Melliship's bank, were there; those whom he had saved from ruin, like little Tweedy, the builder; those whom he had saved from shame, like Sullivan, the clerk; those for whom he had ever found a word of rough sympathy, and a hand ready to help; above all, the children, awe-stricken and terrified, in whose memory he lived as the universal friend and benefactor. From highest to lowest; from Lord Hunslope to the beggarman, all came to shed tears over the untimely death of Dick Mortiboy. "Truly," said the Rector, "charity covereth a multitude of sins."

It was all over now. His burly form was with them no more; the vault was closed; the service read; they would never again hear his ringing laugh,

his soft and sympathetic voice. The women would no longer, if they were poor, go to him to pour out their tales of want; if they were well to do, look after him in the street, so handsome, so good, so soft-hearted, so strong. The men would no longer admire him for his skill and strength, or envy him for his prosperity. All was over. Dick Mortiboy was buried.

CHAPTER THE FIFTEENTH.

IF it was hard for Ghrimes, what, as the lawyer said, would it be for Frank?

He received the letter containing Dick Mortiboy's offer. It came on the Monday evening, the day before Dick's murder. He read it with an emotion which he thought he had almost conquered; for he read in it the signal to him to leave his uncongenial life, and go back to his own position. His heart beat high with joy. It was not only Dick's free and generous offer. It was Grace's command that he should take it. It was the recall of his sister and mother to the place where all their friends lived, and all their interests were centred. A letter of recall and pardon to an exile; the restoration of a prince to his own again.

"You've got good news, Mr. Mellishipp?" asked Patty, looking at his height and colour, and flashing eyes.

"Good news? Yes, Patty, very good. The best possible. The best news that ever was brought to any poor, unlucky beggar."

But his pride. How was he to reconcile his pride to accepting help from the son of his father's enemy?

Pride—yes—he had some slight grounds for pride. In the first place he could be independent so long as his voice lasted. That great and splendid gift, a tenor voice, was his. It lay with him to accept Mr. Leweson's offer to go to Italy and study for a year or two, and then to return and make his fortune. It was certain that he could do so. But to return to the bank—to go back to the old life again!

He walked out to call on Mr. Eddrup.

The old man was dressed, and sitting on his chair, too feeble to move.

Frank told him the great offer which had been made him. Perfect confidence existed between the two, by this time. Frank had told him all his life, with its disappointments and misfortunes.

"Take it," said Mr. Eddrup. "I, too, have an

offer to make you. I shall make it with all the more confidence, if I know that you are rich, and therefore can command the influence of wealth."

"What is it?"

"I have no children, no relations, except a few cousins, who are already wealthy, and who have lost sight of me for many, many years. I want to leave you all my money—in trust—in trust to find some one, if you can, to carry on the work which I have done. Would that you could carry it on yourself!"

"But how shall I find a man?"

"Silver is the man for you. He has enthusiasm; he has energy; he has the power of administration; he has sympathy. Let Silver be my successor."

"Then why not leave him the money in trust?"

"Because he would not quite understand; he would be trying to make it a means of forming a society with rules and creeds, and so crystallize and kill what I want to grow and develop. Remember, young man, faith is the fertilizer; creed is the destroyer. Further, I want you to bequeath the property, after your death, so that it may be used by your successor—whom you will have to find—in the same spirit. I will not lay down rules. I will

not add another to the Charities which do already so much harm. I want my money to be used always in the most intelligent manner possible to the time;—never by a committee."

On Wednesday afternoon he sat down to write his letter. As he began—"My dear Dick," a boy came shouting down the street, with an early edition of the *Echo.*

Frank, moved by some impulse, opened the window and beckoned the boy. Then he left his letter-writing for a while, and leisurely began to read.

Presently, Patty knocked at the door. She found him staring vacantly before him, with the paper in his hands. The last two days had been a time of trial for the poor girl. She saw, by Frank's manner, on Monday, that something was going to happen—she knew not what, which would sever him from her. She had been striving herself, bitterly, but steadily, to look the truth in the face. Frank did not love her. In spite of his kind ways and little attentions, the sweeter to Patty because she had never known them before, and was never to know them again,—he had never loved her. And she, poor girl, had given all her heart to him.

For his sake she spent sleepless nights, devising things which would please him; and careful days watching to see if she had pleased him. All the little arts which she knew, few enough, she practised to catch his eye. For him she had learned to despise the calling in which she had once almost gloried, and herself for practising it.

She sat down before him, and waited, hands clasped, for him to speak.

"Patty," he said at last, seeing her beside him, "a dreadful thing has happened. Read that—He was my cousin—I was to have been his partner—and now he is dead. I was writing to him when I bought the paper—I am a beggar again—'"

"Then you are just the same as you were last Sunday?" Her heart gave a little exultant bound.

"The same? No—Are you the same if, when you are thirsty, some one dashes the cup from your lips? You are thirsty still, you say. Yes, but you are more than thirsty. You are maddened. Patty, I have had the cup dashed from my lips—I cannot think of poor Dick Mortiboy. I can only think of myself. I am only selfish in my sorrow."

The final blow had fallen. Patty turned white, and bit her lips; for the blood left her cheeks, and

she felt as if she would faint. Presently he made an effort to speak.

"How can I go to her now—to the girl I love? How can I say—take me—I am a beggar and you an heiress—take me?"

"If she loves you, what matter does it make? If I loved a man do you think it would matter to me that I had—oh! hundreds of pounds and he had nothing? Mr. Melliship, if she loves you, you must go to her. Perhaps I don't understand. I always thought that when people loved each other they don't care for money. Is it not so? I mean rich people, of course we poor people never think about it, because we never have any money to think about at all. That is a good thing for us, so far. Tell me more, Mr. Melliship. Does she know that you love her still? Have you promised each other?"

"Yes—too late! Yes—long ago—when I was rich."

"And—and—but I suppose I can't understand. Are you too proud to go to her? But she knows you have no money—there is nothing to hide. If you loved her before, of course you go on loving her now. Do all ladies' hearts change when they have money? What is her name?"

"Grace Heathcote."

"Grace Heathcote — a pretty name — Grace Heathcote. Does she live in the same town with your cousin, who is dead? — what is it?" — She looked at the paper again.—"Market Basing?"

"Near it; ten miles out at a place called Hunslope. At Parkside Farm."

"At Hunslope, ten miles out. At Parkside Farm," she repeated. Then she got up, with lips that quivered, in spite of her courage, and went away.

On Saturday, after their early dinner, she plucked up courage to speak to her father.

"Father—I want to say something to you—two things—I can no longer go on at the Palace. Don't call me ungrateful, after the pains you've took, and all that—I'm not ungrateful, but I can't bear it any longer. I didn't know, till Mr. Melliship came and talked to me, that there was anything in it. I thought it was something to be proud of. But now I can't bear the dress, and I see the women in the place sneering, and the horrid men laughing, as I never saw them before—before Mr. Melliship came."

"Mr. Melliship? Mr. Melliship? Is he in love with you, Patty?"

"No, father," she answered, bursting into tears; "he never loved me; he never said a word of love to me. But, I—oh! I'm only a silly girl—and I fancied he might take a fancy to me. Forgive me, father—. It is all folly and wickedness. He loves another girl—a lady. What am I, that I should take the fancy of a gentleman? Only a poor trapeze girl; only a common thing. I can't write well; I can't dress well; I can't do anything—I don't know how—that he likes. I have tried—oh! how I have tried—and he so good. He never laughed at me. But I could see the difference that he felt. Let him go back to his own people, and let me be alone."

The prophet turned his eyes upon the portrait.

"Jephtha's daughter," he murmured. "Jephtha's daughter—I knew it all along."

"And I can't act any more," said Patty. "Tell Mr. Leweson so. He is very good to us. But I can't do it."

"I've told him, Patty. I've told him. For I had some news for you that I thought would keep till to-morrow. See, now. This is the last night of our performance. You, and I, and Joey, act to-night, for the last time. They've got another family—a poor sort, Patty, compared to you

and me—but there they are. They begin on Monday. I meant to tell you to-morrow. But I can't keep it. I am to be Mr. Eddrup's clerk. His clerk, Patty, so long as he lives. Think of that. With a salary. I'm to preach every Sunday. And when Mr. Eddrup dies, Mr. Melliship is to have all his money, in trust for the poor people. For these, and all other mercies, God's holy name be praised."

Patty was silent for a moment.

"I've been very selfish and vain with my foolishness, father. Now the other thing I had to say; I want a whole sovereign, father, and I want to go away early to-morrow, and be away all day; perhaps all Sunday night and Monday morning. Let me go, and don't ask me the reason why. That is my secret. Give me the money and let me go. I must go. My heart is breaking till I go. Mr. Eddrup would say I am right. I know he would. Father, if you doubt me, I will go and ask him myself if I am not right."

"Nay; if he thinks you are right, I've got nothing to say. Does Mr. Melliship send you?"

"No.....no.....no....." she crimsoned violently. "Don't say a word to him about it. A secret, father, and not my own. Oh! don't say a word against it. Because I must do it. I must, indeed.

It is somebody else's secret. And even he doesn't know."

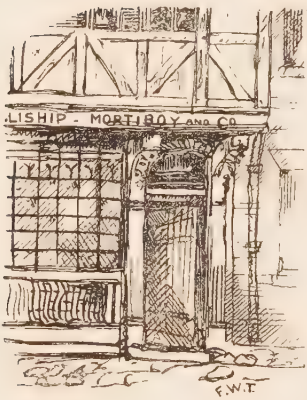
"I suppose it is Mr. Melliship's, then?"

She turned scarlet.

"It is, father," she whispered, "and it is for his good. Give me the money and let me go."

"A great sum, Polly. But you're a good girl, and you shall have your own way. I wish it wasn't Sunday, because I'm going to tell the story, in the afternoon, of the Roman Catholic priests. I've been getting it out of Ezekiel; and you'd have liked to hear it no doubt."

CHAPTER THE SIXTEENTH.



MRS. HEATHCOTE is heiress to all. The gigantic estate of the Mortiboys, little impaired by Dick's lavish expenditure, is hers, to have and to hold. The fact has been communicated to her officially by Mr. Battiscombe. No will had been made. No frittering away of a great property by miserable bequests: nothing left to collateral branches of the family; Ghrimes and the Mellishipps out of it altogether. All Mrs. Heathcote's.

In the first stupor of delight she sat tranquil, scarcely able to face the fact that she was rich beyond her dreams. Then, and before poor Dick was buried, she began to make plans and settle how they were in future to live. She talked, the sealed fountain of her ambition once set moving again, perpetually on this one topic—what they should do, what changes they were to make in their style of living, how they were to astonish the world.

"We shall, of course," she said to her daughter, "go to London to live. Your father must give up his vulgar habits."

"My father has no vulgar habits," said Grace, always rebellious.

"Grace, don't contradict. Is it, or is it not, vulgar to smoke pipes after dinner?" No answer being given to this clincher, she went on. "We shall dine at half past seven, go into society; balls, I suppose, every night; we shall be presented at court, of course; your father will give up his poky farm, and we shall buy an estate somewhere. Ghrimes will go on managing the bank, though I must say the salary he draws seems ridiculous. Pictures again; I suppose we must patronize Art; my dear, it will be very hard work at first, but you may trust your mother to do the best for you;

and when my girls do marry—if they marry with my approbation—" giving a glance at Grace, " they may depend upon my generosity."

" I am going to marry Frank Mellishiip," said Grace, quickly. Lucy said nothing. It was a constant trial to the poor girls to bear this grating upon their nerves ; the more trying because they had to disguise it even from each other, and because it was so essentially different to that straightforward, honest simplicity, and even delicacy of their father. There are some men without the slightest refinement in manner, not at all the men to be invited to dinner, who are yet the most perfect and absolute masters of good breeding, inasmuch as they never offend in their speech, and go delicately about among the tender corns of their friends. Such was John Heathcote. To him the doctor communicated the three or four lines which Dick had forced him to write. John took them to lawyer Battiscombe, in hopes that they would give his girls a claim to the estate which else his wife would have ; what manner of life his would be if Lydia Heathcote got it all, he trembled to think. No use ; the money was all his wife's. Battiscombe told him of Polly ; he explained the law of the land as regards married women's property ; and

advised him as to the carrying out of Dick's intentions, in the spirit, if not in the letter.

Thus fortified, Farmer John felt himself strong enough to fight his battles, and began to put his foot down.

He let his wife run on till she was fairly exhausted, on the subject of improvements and changes, then he quietly asserted himself:—

"When you've done making your plans, Lydia you may as well consult me, and ascertain what I am going to do?"

"John Heathcote, who is the owner of the Mortiboy property?" asked Lydia with withering contempt.

"I am. Your husband is."

She gasped with astonishment.

"Do you mean to tell me, John Heathcote, that I am not the possessor of everything?"

"Certainly not. All the personalty is mine absolutely. All the reality is mine so long as you live. When you die, you may bequeath it to whom you will."

"Is that the law? do you dare to assert that the law of England allows that? And they call this a Christian and a Protestant country."

"Let us understand one another, Lydia. We

are plain people, and intend to remain so. You and I are old, and unfit for the society to which we were not brought up—"

"John—I unfit. Pray do you forget that I was seven years at the best and most select Boarding school in Market Basing?"

"I dare say they finished you very well for a farmer's wife, such as you've been for five-and-twenty years. No—no—we are too old and too wise to change, Lyddy. No town life for us. I mean to go on exactly the same."

"You imagine, John, that I am going to consent to live like that, with all the money coming in? Do you call yourself a churchman, John? Do you know that it's your duty—your positive duty—to keep up your station? I, for one, shall not consent. So there."

"You need not, Lyddy," said her husband, quickly. "If you refuse you must live elsewhere. And I don't know where you'll find the money. Don't be downcast, wife. A little extra finery you can have, if you like, and spend anything in reason, consistent with your position. I'm a farmer. The girls can spend the money when they marry. Another thing. Whatever Dick intended to do, it is our duty to do. Now read that."

He put into his wife's hands Dick's last few words.

"Poor Dick! His last wishes. We must obey them."

"Papa," said Grace, eagerly, "you are really going to do all that Dick intended should be done?"

"All, Grace. Everything."

"Then consult George Ghrimes about another thing, papa. Ask him what Dick was going to do about him, and—ask, papa—"

"If there's secrets going on, I suppose I had better go," said her mother. "John Heathcote, when I married you, little did I think that I was marrying a man capable of sheltering himself behind the law, in order that he might continue in his low and grovelling position."

John Heathcote laughed. It was never his plan to argue with his wife, else the argument would have been perennial.

The next day, being three days after the funeral, Mrs. Heathcote thought she might as well make a visit to Derngate and the villa, and take possession of the things there, whatever there might be to have.

The garden door was open, and the front door was open.

She walked into the dining-room—no one there —and into Dick's smoking-room.

In his easy chair, in deepest widow's weeds, with a handkerchief to her eyes, sat Polly.

It was her greatest coup, though it failed. She learned the death of Dick from the papers, and instantly made up her mind what to do. Without going through the formality of acquainting Captain Bowker with her intentions, she bought a widow's cap and crape, got into the train, and came to Market Basing. She would get her confession back first, and then, after laying hands on everything portable, would come to such terms as could, in a short space of time, and before the thing was found out, be obtained.

"Mary!" cried Mrs. Heathcote, "what is the meaning of this?"

"Mrs. Richard Mortiboy, Mrs. Heathcote, I should say Cousin Heathcote," said Polly, wiping her eyes again. "Oh, what a dreadful thing it is to lose your husband, and him but just returned from foreign parts and savages."

"Mary! woman! you are mad!"

She shook her head, and sobbed the faster.

"Poor Dick! I shall never see his like again. Mrs. Heathcote, won't you sit down? It's my

house, and all Dick's money is mine, but we shan't fall out. Families ought to live peaceful. Sit down, young ladies."

Grace knew that she was speaking the truth, but silence was best. They remained standing. Polly still gave from time to time a convulsive heave, by which she meant to express the poignancy of her sorrow.

"Perhaps you will explain yourself, Mary Tresler," said her late mistress.

"Ho! there's no objection of explaining. None in the world, Mrs. Heathcote, Cousin Heathcote. I've been married to Dick Mortiboy for twelve years and more, married in London, at St. Pancridge's Church, where you may go yourself and look. And now I'm come to claim my rights, as in duty bound, and an honest woman should. Don't think I'm bearing any malice for old times, Mrs. Heathcote, though you always were a screw, and you know it. It isn't the place now nor the time, when I'm weeping over the last bier of my poor dear lost Dick, to throw your cold mutton and your broken victuals in your teeth; no, nor your eight pounds a year, paid to your cousin's lawful wife, nor your flannels at Christmas. No, let's be friends all round, I say. I only come up this morning, and

here I'm going to stick. Perhaps, as you are here, you'll tell me where Dick's safe is, where he keeps his papers, because that's mine, that is, and there's something particular of my own that I want back again."

It was awkward for Polly, in the execution of her grand coup, that she had no conception where the safe was, in which she knew that her written confession lay, nor indeed what a safe was like when she saw one. She had a notion that it was a wooden box, kept probably in his bed-room, the breaking open of which would put her in possession of the dangerous document. But she could find no wooden box, though she had searched the whole house through, and she naturally began to feel uneasy. Where had Dick put it? Mrs. Heathcote was speechless. This indeed, was a calamity far worse than the obstinacy of her husband. That the perfidious Dick should actually have had a wife, her own servant, and have said nothing to anybody, was a thing so utterly beyond the scope of her experience, that her brain seemed to be wandering. Her lips parted, but she said nothing.

"Oh, it's a dreadful thing," Polly went on, "to be a widow. And me so young; and such a good husband. I hope you may never experience it,

Mrs. Heathcote; never, Cousin Heathcote. It's a dreadful thing, and money won't make up for it. What's money to the loss of my Dick?"

"Grace," said Mrs. Heathcote, "am I in my senses? Is this woman mad?"

"Woman!" cried the bereaved one, starting up in a violent rage. "No more woman than you are. How dare you call me woman? For two pins, Mrs. Heathcote, I'd scratch out your eyes. You and your cold mutton, indeed, and no followers allowed. But I'll comb you down yet, you see if I don't."

The door opened, and Mr. Ghrimes appeared. In his hand a bundle of papers.

"Oh!" he said, coolly, seeing Polly, "Joe, the stable-boy, told me you were here. Now, what may you be wanting in this house? No nonsense, you know, because it won't do with me."

"Mr. Ghrimes, my clerk," said Polly, "my servant, and the manager of my Bank; don't be insolent, young man, or I'll give you warning, and send you about your business, sharp enough, so down on your knees, if *you* please. Other people can manage a bank as well as you." All the same, her heart misgave her at the sight of the calm cold man of business, who evidently knew exactly what

he was saying, and was not a whit moved at her brave words.

"We will talk about discharging afterwards. At present, you had better go yourself. Yes, I mean that you must go, and that at once. Any insults to these ladies will be severely punished. Now go, or I will speak more plainly."

"I shan't go." Polly sat herself down in the armchair, and spread out her skirts in a very determined manner.

"You won't? Very well." Mr. Ghrimes stepped outside. Voices were heard, and steps in the passage, and Polly's cheek visibly blanched.

He came back. Behind him were Mr. Battiscombe, Farmer John, and a third person, a stranger to the rest, at sight of whom, Polly sprang up and sat down again, as if she had received a mortal blow. He was a middle aged man, with a red beard, and blue eyes, and a nervous hesitating manner, who came with the others half unwillingly; no other, in fact, than Captain Bowker.

"Now, madam," said Mr. Ghrimes, "who is this gentleman?"

"Oh!" said Polly, "I'll take it out of you for this. Only you wait."

"Let me explain," said the lawyer. "We sus-

pected your little game, you see, and we took our steps—had you watched, followed you to the station, found where you were going to, and brought Captain Bowker, *your husband*, down after you by the next train."

"Her husband!" cried Mrs. Heathcote, "you wicked, wicked woman. Mr. Battiscombe, what is the extreme penalty which the law exacts for this offence? Is it twenty years, or is it fifty? I forget at this moment. I know they used to hang for it in the good old days."

"What's more," said the captain in a husky voice, "they've told me your whole history, and I find I can be free whenever I like. So, Polly, you may go your own way. By the Lord, if you come near me again, I *will* be free, and you shall be in a prison. I'm going back to Skimp's. You shan't say I hid myself. There I stay—find me out there if you dare."

"You calf of a sea captain, do you think I want to come after you? I despise you too much," said Polly grandly.

"And her mother in the workhouse," ejaculated Mrs. Heathcote, as if the fact had an important bearing on the case.

"Had you not better go now?" asked Ghrimes.

"It will be well for you to go by the next train; it leaves in twenty minutes. I will drive you to the station."

Polly removed the white cap of widowhood, and laid it on the table.

"You may have it, Mrs. Heathcote, mum, keep it for my sake, and be very careful about your cold pork. Go on locking up the key of the beer cellar, and don't let the maids have no followers, then you'll go on being as much beloved as you always have been much beloved, if you go on, that is, as you always have been a going on. Good-bye, young ladies. Miss Grace, I'd do you a good turn if I could, because you deserve it, and you know why; you was always the best of the bunch. Good-bye, Miss Lucy, eat and drink a bit more, and don't read too many tracts, and you'll be as pretty as your sister some day, but never so good. She knows how to hold her tongue, she does. One good thing—" she concluded, looking at her husband with a gaze of concentrated hatred, which caused his knees to shake beneath him, "one good thing—one gracious good thing, I'm rid of a poor spirited barrel of salt sea pork; I shan't see you no more. Ugh! you and your verses! If I get home first, I'll BURN 'em all."

"You can't, Polly," said her husband meekly, "I've got 'em in my coat tail pocket, every one, with a new 'Ode to Resignation,' which I composed when you were asleep."

She passed out, holding her head high. Ghrimes followed her, and drove her to the station.

CHAPTER THE SEVENTEENTH.

IT is Sunday, nearly a fortnight after Dick's death. The Heathcotes, returned from church, are on the lawn in front of the house. The noise of wheels on the private road leading to the farm is heard, an unusual thing, unless when poor Dick Mortiboy drove over on Sunday.

It was a town "fly,"—one of those delightful vehicles which are found at country stations, which have all the bad qualities of the London growler without any of its good ones, always supposing that it has good ones. It drove up to the door, and a girl got down and looked timidly at the group on the lawn. A pretty girl, a wonderfully pretty girl, pale faced, bright eyed, with regular if rather com-

monplace features, and a great mass of rich brown hair, neatly dressed in a coloured stuff frock, brown jacket, and a bundle of wild flowers in her hand. She could not resist the temptation of stopping the fly to pick them from the hedge. She opened the gate, and walked in, colouring painfully.

Mr. Heathcote slowly walked down the gravel path to meet her.

"Mr. Heathcote?" she asked, "oh! I don't want you—I want Miss Grace Heathcote. Which is Miss Grace Heathcote?"

"I am Grace Heathcote. Pray what can I do for you?"

Patty—it was Patty Silver—looked at her for a few minutes, and then, clasping her hands together, burst into tears.

For she contrasted herself with the girl who stood before her: herself, common, half educated, badly dressed, with this presence of a lady, glorious in her beauty and her grace.

The unconscious rival looked at her in wonder, but did not speak.

"Let me speak somewhere alone with you, Miss Heathcote," said Patty, "quite alone. I have something very important to tell you."

"Papa, I am going to take this young lady to

the drawing-room. Do not wait dinner for me. Come with me, please."

She sailed across the lawn, taking poor little Patty after her, into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Heathcote heard the door shut and locked.

"John," she cried, putting her head out of the window, "pray who is that young woman?"

"I don't know," said John.

"John, if you were half a husband, to say nothing of a father, you would have known that it was your duty to bring her to me first. Secrets, indeed; I will have no secrets in my house, I can tell you."

"Grace, let me in this moment."

"Is that you, mamma?" answered her daughter, in the clear resolute tones which always made her mother quail and give way, "Is that you, mamma? Go on with dinner; do not wait for me; I shall be ready presently."

Mrs. Heathcote knocked once more at the door, but faintly, and finding no attention bestowed upon her, retreated again.

Dinner was served, but Grace did not return. So they sat down without her, John Heathcote alone being able to take his meal with the usual Sabbath enjoyment.

"I believe, John," said his wife, "that you would go on eating if the world was on fire."

"Well, Lyddy, if my not eating could put out the fire, I would stop. If not, I dare say I should eat so long as I was hungry, unless the fire was burning my toes."

"John—you are blasphemous. On Sunday, too, and your daughter locked up with a stranger, talking secrets."

"What if she is? Grace's secrets are not mine. There can't be any harm in Grace's secrets, poor girl, and she's welcome to a bushel of them. Something to do with Frank, I expect. That reminds me, Lydia. A week before his death, Dick had a deed of partnership drawn out, but not executed, between himself, Frank Melliship, and George Ghrimes."

"Not executed," said Lydia.

"No—but the intention was the same. I have had it drawn out again between myself, Frank Melliship, and George Ghrimes, on poor Dick's plan. I am going to take them both into partnership with me."

"John Heathcote," said his wife. "It is a dreadful thing, a really dreadful thing to see the way you are going on. If this partnership is carried into

effect, I shall feel it my duty, as a wife and a mother—to—to—"

"What will you do, Lydia?"

"To call in London doctors, and have your brain examined for Softening. It *must* be Softening, John."

John put down his knife and fork, and laughed till the tears ran down his face. The idea of his brain softening was so novel, so unexpected, so good, that he laughed again and again. He was not in the least angry.

"You always would have your joke, Lyddy," he said, with a choke. "Softening. Ho! ho! ho! And you've always called me the hardest man you know. But I'm glad you approve of the partnership. Very glad. Because, though I *am* the administrator of all this money, I always feel that I'm doing it for you, Lyddy. It's well you're a good-hearted woman—very well. Some women would have made a fuss, and objected. Not you. That's what I like about you, wife. You never object when it's no good, and you're always ready to back me up when I'm doing what's right."

I have never been able to make up my mind, whether this speech of John's was stupid, or whether it was sarcastic. I fancy it was the latter, and

that John was by no means so simple as his wife thought him.

"Now," said Grace, in the drawing-room, "sit down, and tell me what you came to tell me."

She sat on the bed, and Patty on the easy chair by its side. The girl was lost in contemplating the length to which civilization can go in furnishing a lady's room; the bright draperies; the dainty appointments; the looking-glass. She looked up hesitatingly.

"Do all ladies have rooms like this?"

"Yes, I suppose so. Why? There is nothing very grand in this room, is there?"

Patty sighed. "You should see mine," she said, "and you would know what I mean.—Miss Heathcote, I came to-day from London. I come from Mr. Mellishiip."

"From Frank?"

"From Mr. Frank Mellishiip. He does not know I'm come. Let me tell my story from the beginning. He lives with father. So we know him, you see. Last Monday week I saw him reading a letter, and looking bright and happy. You know, miss, he'd been terribly pulled down and worried of late. He told me he had got good news—the best

of news—and he went out, and up the street I saw him walking as if the ground was made of india-rubber. Then he came home, and sang all over the house like a lark. Next day, Tuesday that was, he said to me, 'Patty,'—he always calls me Patty, miss, because father does, I suppose,—'Patty, I shan't write my letter till to-morrow, because I'm waiting to find out how to answer the most generous man in the world.' And he pleased himself all day drawing pictures—such pictures—I've got them all. On Wednesday, I went in at half-past two. He had his writing-table before him, and he had the *Echo* in his hand. 'Patty,' he said, 'he's dead—and she is lost to me!'"

Grace turned colour. "Go on," she said.

"'She's lost to me!' Then he told me all about you, Miss Heathcote; how he loved you, and you loved him; and how Mr. Mortiboy was going to make him rich, so that you could marry, but he died and could not. And then he told me that he could never go to you now, because you were rich and he was a beggar. This was last Wednesday week. He told me with the tears running down his handsome face, where you lived, and all about it... Well, Miss Heathcote, he's been getting lower and lower ever since; he doesn't eat, he doesn't sing,

he never draws, he sits at the window with his head in his hands, and never speaks at all. I couldn't bear to see it; so I bought a railway guide, and found out the Sunday trains, and made father give me money to pay my return ticket, and came down here to tell you all about it. Miss Heathcote, it can't be that you're going to throw him over because you are rich? It can't be that you don't love him any more because he is poor? Don't tell me that—don't let him go on killing himself. Don't be proud. Ladies are mostly too proud, I think. And so are gentlemen. He will never come to you. Oh! Miss Heathcote, if I loved—if he loved me—and I was rich, I would go to him and kiss him, and say, Frank, what does it matter whether you have any money or not?—I am only a poor girl, Miss Heathcote, and no education, and get my living in a way I am almost ashamed to say—I'm a trapeze girl—but I should be too proud—oh! I should be too proud to let my love die when a word would save him."

"What is your name?" asked Grace, the tears running down her face.

"Patty Silver. I am only the girl that performs on the trapeze, at the Music Hall. I do it with my father, though."

"Patty Silver—you love Frank Melliship, yourself."

Polly covered her face with her hands.

"I do—I do—" she murmured. "Forgive me, Miss Heathcote. He never looked at me. I let myself love him without thinking. Who could help loving him? But he only loves you. He thinks of you. He draws your portrait always. Me? as if a gentleman like Mr. Melliship would think of me. But I loved him—oh! me—me—I loved him, and I love him always."

Grace knelt down and took Patty's face in her hands, and looked at it.

"Poor Patty! Poor little girl. You will get over your love some day. Your trial is hard. What shall I do for you, for the joy and gladness you have brought me? I knew he would be faithful; but you know—girls are so—there were times when I doubted. Now wait a moment—you will see that I am not too proud, and not so cold a fine lady as you think me, perhaps. Wait here for one moment only."

She went into the dining-room, where her father was just opening a bottle of port.

"Papa—come into the other room with me."

"More secrets, of course," said Mrs. Heathcote.

John Heathcote, with a sigh, followed his daughter.

"Papa—this young lady comes to me, unknown to Frank, to tell me that he is ill and miserable. He got a letter from Dick the day before his death, offering him a partnership in the bank. Then he saw the death in the paper, and has been prostrated ever since. What ought we to do?"

"First thing, let him know that he is to be a partner. Make him a new offer."

"You must do that, yourself. What next?"

"Why, we must go and find him out as soon as we can, and bring him back here."

"What a good father it is!" said his daughter, wheedling him. "He always says the wisest things, and the kindest things. We must find him. Patty here will take us to him; you must tell him—you must go yourself; we must find him at once—we will go together—at once—to-day, by the afternoon train. We will go back with Patty—will we not?"

Here she gave way and fell upon Patty's neck, crying and laughing. Lucy came running up stairs. Her mother stayed below.

"They may manage their own secrets them-

selves," she said, taking a glass of port with a bitter feeling.

"Lucy, my dear. My carpet bag with things for the night, and your sister's, too. Pack up quickly. Grace, take this young lady with you and have some dinner and give her some." He went down, and found his wife in a sour and crabbed frame.

"Lyddy, my dear," he said, with a cheerful smile, "I've got good news for you; we've found Frank Mellishipp. I'm going up to town with Grace to bring him back. He's all right. We'll marry them in a month, and you shall dance at their wedding, my girl. Give me a glass of wine."

He drank off hers, without an apology. "Oh! I forgot to tell you—keep this a great secret—I had a talk with Lord Hunslope yesterday about things. He hinted that though Grace would not have Lord Launton, perhaps his lordship would have better luck with Lucy. Eh! Lyddy, what do you think of a coronet for your girl?"

"Lucy, dear girl! she always was my own girl—took after my family and me," said Mrs. Heathcote, mollified. "Grace was always a Heathcote; well, well, you must have your own way, I suppose. Come back to-morrow, John, if you can. Dear

Lucy!—how she would become a coronet. After all, John, I hardly think poor dear Grace is quite the woman to be a countess. There's a little too much independence about her; too much of the Heathcote about her; not quite subdued enough in her manner. She will do admirably as a banker's wife, no doubt. Is the young person properly looked after?"

"Grace will do that."

"Then sit down, John, for five minutes and talk. Don't be racing up and down the stairs after dinner. At your time of life, too. You might get apoplexy, and go off suddenly, like poor Mr. Hawthorne, only three weeks ago. You think the earl means what he says?"

"The earl is straightforward enough, at any rate. He is poor and we are rich. Think on what we ought to give Lucy if it comes off. Don't say anything to the girl. She's as timid as a fawn, and would only run away and hide herself. But think what we ought to give and tell me. The earl—whisper now—owes the bank fifty thousand pounds. There, wife, I've given you something to think over while I am gone."

Mrs. Heathcote kissed Grace with a really maternal affection again, whispering: "Bring him

back, dear; you have your mother's approbation now. But you must forgive me for being a little disappointed before, you know. He was always my favourite, Frank, after poor Dick. As for Lord Launton, I forgive you. And no doubt it is all for the best. Give Frank my best love, dear—and bless you."

* * * * *

Frank was sitting in his little room alone and miserable. Mr. Silver was gone off to chapel. There was nobody in the house. A cab came rumbling along the street and stopped at the door. He did not hear it.

Patty opened the door with her latch-key and led her guests upstairs. He looked up as they came into the room. It was Grace, with her father.

"Frank," whispered Grace, as he caught her in his arms, "you were too proud to come to us. So we have come to you."

"Not to let you go again, my boy," said her father, shaking him by the hand.

"Never again, Frank, never again. We part no more."

Love and joy in that little room. Upstairs,

Patty lying on her bed, trying to stop the tears and sobs that shake her frame. The prophet was right. She was even as the daughter of Jephthah, doomed to lament her loneliness among the mountains all her days.

ENVOY.

THREE farewell tableaux. The first in Paris. It is at St. Cloud, when, close by the ruins of the chateau, in a small, close room, they are trying the Communist prisoners in the winter of last year. A long table or a platform, behind which are sitting a dozen officers, whose cold, stern faces bode little mercy to the poor creatures brought before them. One by one they are brought up to receive their sentence. They are cowed by imprisonment and suffering ; they are ragged, starved, miserable. Mostly, they receive their sentences, which are comparatively light, with a kind of gratitude, because they know the worst. There is one

exception. He is a thin man, with keen, bright eyes. His cheeks and chin are covered with the ragged beard of three months' growth. His black hair is thick and matted ; his clothes, such as they are, scarcely hold together upon him. He alone of the prisoners stands up before his judges with an air of defiance. Accused at first of being taken with arms in his hand, he is now, on further evidence, charged with complicity in the murder of the archbishop. He has neither boots nor shoes ; a rag is round his neck ; he shivers in the cold December air ; but his hands are delicate, shapely, and white—the hands of a gentleman. He is asked his name and profession. He shrugs his shoulders and spreads out his hands.

"Bah ! It is the hundredth time. I am tired of it. Let us finish. My name is Lafleur. I was in the ranks of the Commune. Did I love the cause of the Communist ? No more than yourselves. Do I love your cause ? Perhaps as much as you do. Did I assist at the execution of the archbishop ? I did. Now, M. le President, your sentence."

It came swiftly enough.

In the cold grey of the morning, he stands against a wall with his hands in his pockets, a cigar in his mouth, and a mocking smile on his lips. No

word of repentance? None. Of scoffing or blasphemy? None. The roll of the rifles for a moment, and the next, a dead man falls, face downward on the ground. He could bear most things that fate had to bring, but the misery, the filth, the degradation, the starvation, the cold, rags, famine, evil companionship, to which the Versaillists have condemned their unhappy enemies, were too much for him. So he confessed—threw up the cards—and was sentenced.

Down at the docks there is a certain particularly dirty and muddy crossing, which requires in all weathers, so deeply rooted is its delight in mud, the constant attendance of a broom. It is wielded by a boy, small and thin, but strong and healthy. He answers to the name of Bill. On sunny days he is accompanied by a friend, older than himself, with a curiously wizened and lined countenance, like that of an old man. He does not work himself, but sits in the sunshine, on the steps of a door which is never opened. Here the cold winds come not, and there is a southern aspect.

"Thoozy," says the boy, "it's more than a year since Uncle Dick died."

"So it is, old chap, so it is. Poor Uncle Dick!

But we've done pretty well since then, haven't we, old chap? What's the whole duty of a boy, Bill, as he used to learn you?"

"Never prig, never tell lies—" he runs off Dick's ten commandments on his fingers, just as he had been taught.

"Right you are, Bill. Go away from England. Yes, we'll go some day, old chap, when we've saved a little money, and you've got stronger. Uncle Dick was a good sort, Bill, I can tell you. We shan't meet no more Uncle Dicks in the world. Let's remember all he used to say, and act on it, Bill, my boy."

Another scene. It is evening: three people are standing in the moonlight, in the square, place, or principal open street of Market Basing, before a newly erected statue, unveiled that morning with much ceremony, bands of music, and many speeches. They are Frank and Grace, with them Patty Silver.

"I am glad it is like Dick," said Grace, with a sigh. "I couldn't bear that our noble Dick should look ugly and unlike. I'll tell you about him, Patty, some day, when we have it all to ourselves, and you want to learn a long story about a good and a great-hearted man. Let us go in now. I

wanted to see it when all the people were gone, and have a little cry all to myself over it."

Patty is staying with them. She has given up her profession, and lives with her father ; he preaches every evening, and will probably some day be reverenced as the founder of a new sect. Life is made easy for him by Mr. Eddrup, who lingers still, and by Grace Melliship, Frank's wife. Patty will never marry. To have loved a gentleman, not to have been loved by one, has been an education for the girl. She can never love one of her own class. But she is not unhappy, and among the poor people of her neighbourhood finds plenty to do in the way of help and advice. And sometimes Grace gets her to come down to Market Basing, and stay quietly with them till the roses come back to her cheeks, and she can return to her work, a life of unknown and unprofessional self-denial and toil.

Last time I was at Market Basing I made a curious discovery. Looking at Dick's statue, I read the inscription. The usual flourish of trumpets was on the front, setting forth his unblemished moral character, his philanthropy, his generosity, his great schemes for benefiting the human race. On one side was a passage in Greek :

" Πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νοὸν ἔγνω."

This was the rector's doing.

On the other side was a line of English :

"Write me as one who loves his fellow men."

This was Ghrimes's.

On the back, right in the corner, as if put there furtively, in quite small letters, "Rev. xiii. 4." I heard afterwards that Lucy Heathcote, or, to give her new name, Lady Launton, chose a text, which, not being approved of, she privately instructed the sculptor to insert where it could not be seen, anxious, good little soul, that religion should have some part. The sculptor put it in, but made a mistake as to the reference—a most unfortunate one, as I found on looking out the text to which attention is thus publicly called. By great good luck, nobody but Lady Launton and myself has found it out.

THE END.